

# **FLOODWATERS OF DEATH**

**VULNERABILITY AND DISASTER IN  
ORMOC CITY, PHILIPPINES:  
ASSESSING THE 1991 FLOOD AND  
TWENTY YEARS OF RECOVERY**

By

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

*Ma. Theresa M. Alders*

MA. THERESA M. ALDERS



## **ABSTRACT**

On 5 November 1991, a relatively weak and slow-moving Typhoon Thelma—locally codenamed ‘Uring’—with maximum winds of 55 kph, triggered deadly flashfloods that left an estimated 4,000 to 8,000 people dead, over 2,000 missing, at least 3,000 injured, and massive devastation in infrastructure and agriculture valued at over 200 million pesos, or approximately US\$7.3 million. Using ethnography, documentary research and interviews, this dissertation asks about the nature of social change and transformation in a calamitous situation. It assesses the causes of the 1991 flood, its impacts, and twenty-two years of recovery, focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable communities and families. It argues that, in the face of the systematic exploitation and privatization of land for cash crop agriculture since the turn of the twentieth century and the consequent creation of social vulnerability, it was not a ‘natural’ disaster. It is the first known study of its kind to document personal stories of continuing survival in the Philippines after a massive disaster, and as such challenges conventional wisdom that vulnerability for families and communities is resolved after the implementation of intervention programs by government agencies and well-meaning non-government organizations. Using case studies of three communities that survived the 1991 flash floods, it provides a three-fold conclusion. First, poverty and vulnerability are twin situations that remain persistent even after twenty-two years of intervention, with new forms of economic dependency being established in these new communities. Second, the lack of accountability and learning continue to predispose a large portion of Ormoc society to persistent poverty and vulnerability. Finally, the lack of a wide-ranging social memory of that disaster contributes to the lack of accountability and learning.

**Key words:** 1991 Ormoc flash floods, vulnerability, poverty, disaster, natural hazards, recovery

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**MA. THERESA M. ALDERS**

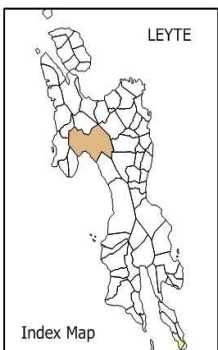
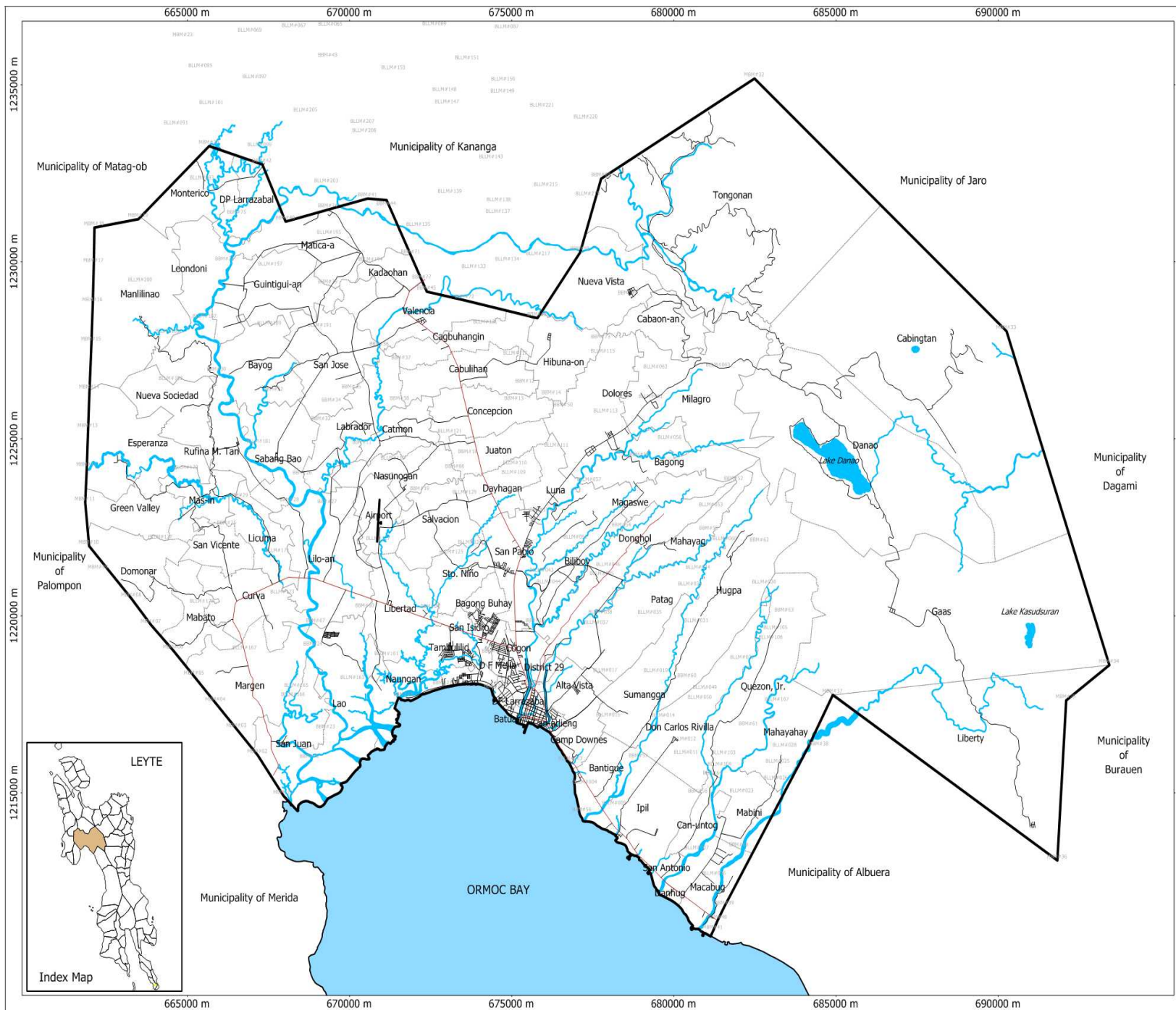
January 2017

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AMRSP	Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines
ARB	Agrarian Reform Beneficiary
BEC	Basic Ecclesial Community
CAFGU	Citizen Armed Force Geographic Unit
CBCP	Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
CDCC	City Disaster Coordinating Council
CLOA	Certificate of Land Ownership Award
CPDO	City Planning and Development Office
CSWD	City Social Welfare and Development
DA	Department of Agriculture
DAR	Department of Agrarian Reform
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
DepEd	Department of Education
DND	Department of National Defense
DOJ	Department of Justice
DOLE	Department of Labor and Employment
DOST	Department of Science and Technology
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
EDC	Energy Development Corporation
FFF	Federation of Free Farmers
GK	Gawad Kalinga
HSSC	Hermenegildo Serafica and Sons Corporation
INC	Iglesia ni Cristo
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KMP	Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas/ Association of Farmers in the Philippines
LGU	Local government unit
NASSA	National Secretariat for Social Action
NDRRMC	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council
NGO	Non government organization
NPA	New People's Army
NSCB	National Statistical Coordination Board*
NSO	National Statistics Office*
OCD	Office of Civil Defense
OSB	Order of Saint Benedict
PAGASA	Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, Astronomical Administration
PAR	Philippine Area of Responsibility
PC	Philippine Constabulary
PCIJ	Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism
PCSO	Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office
PDCC	Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council
PNB	Philippine National Bank
PNOC	Philippine National Oil Company
PNP	Philippine National Police
PNRC	Philippine National Red Cross
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder



RAFI	Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc.
RDCC	Regional Disaster Coordinating Council
RSCJ	Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
SHCEC	Sacred Heart Children's Educational Center
SPDOWFI	Saint Philippine Duchesne Ormoc Workers Foundation, Inc
SSS	Social Security System
UNDRO	United Nations Disaster Relief Organization
* Both the NSO and the NSCB are now combined into the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)	



# ORMOC CITY MAP



Scale 1:30 000  
0 2 km

## LEGEND

- Municipal Boundary
- Barangay Boundary
- National Road
- Road
- Airstrip
- Rivers, Creeks
- Water Body

## Data Sources:

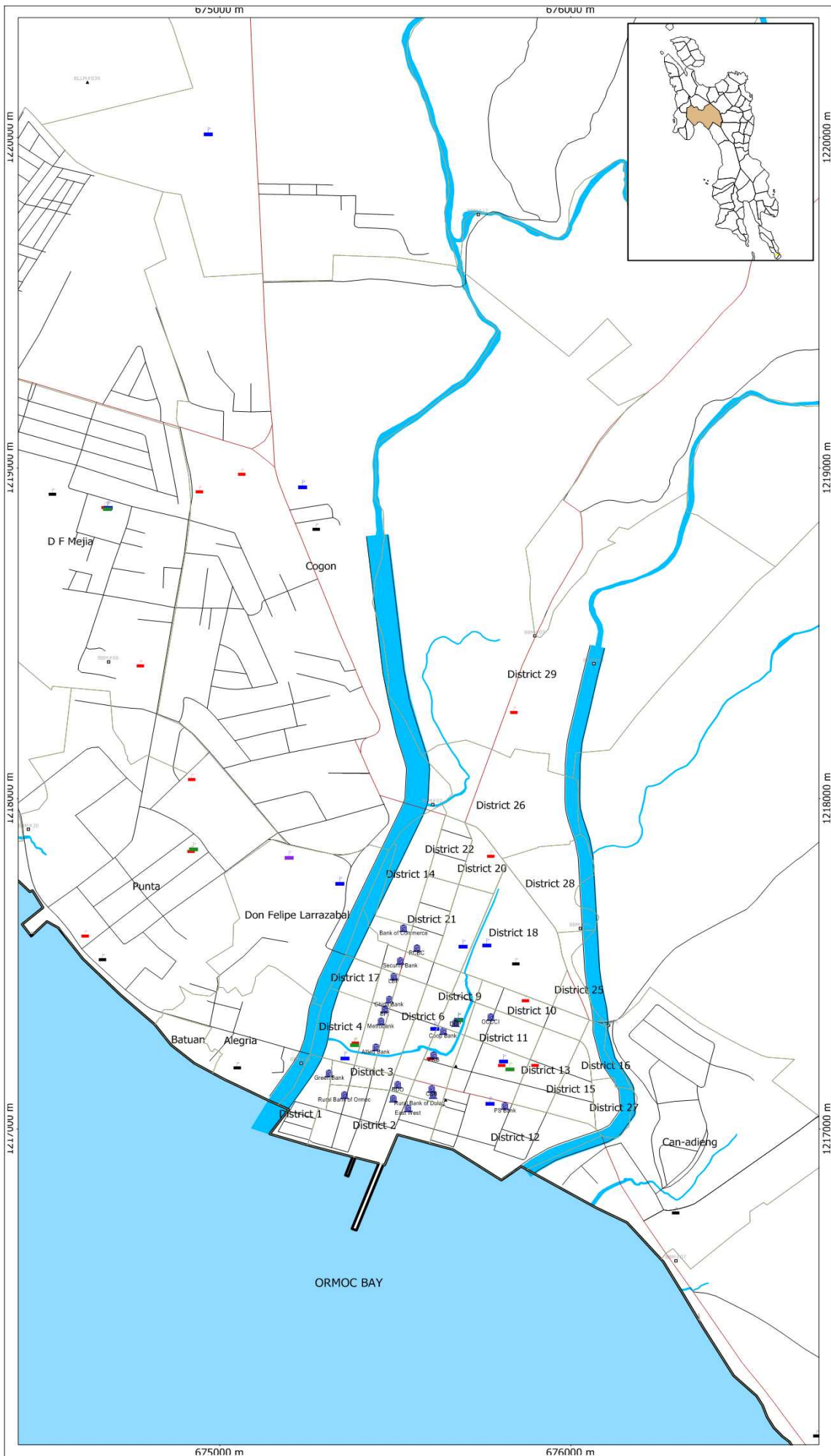
Road & River Network from Digital Colored Orthophoto Mosaic of Ormoc City 1997 (Geo-surey & Mapping Inc.)  
Municipal & Brgy Boundary from Ormoc Cadastre #256.

## Disclaimer:

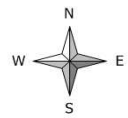
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## ORMOC CITY PROPER



Scale 1:3 000



### LEGEND

- Municipal Boundary
- Barangay Boundary
- National Road
- Road
- Airstrip
- Rivers, Creeks
- Water Body

#### Data Sources:

Road & River Network from Digital Colored Orthophoto  
Mosaic of Ormoc City 1997 (Geo-survey & Mapping Inc.)  
Brigy Boundary from Tax Map (Tax Mapping Division)  
Municipal Boundary from Ormoc Cadastre #256.

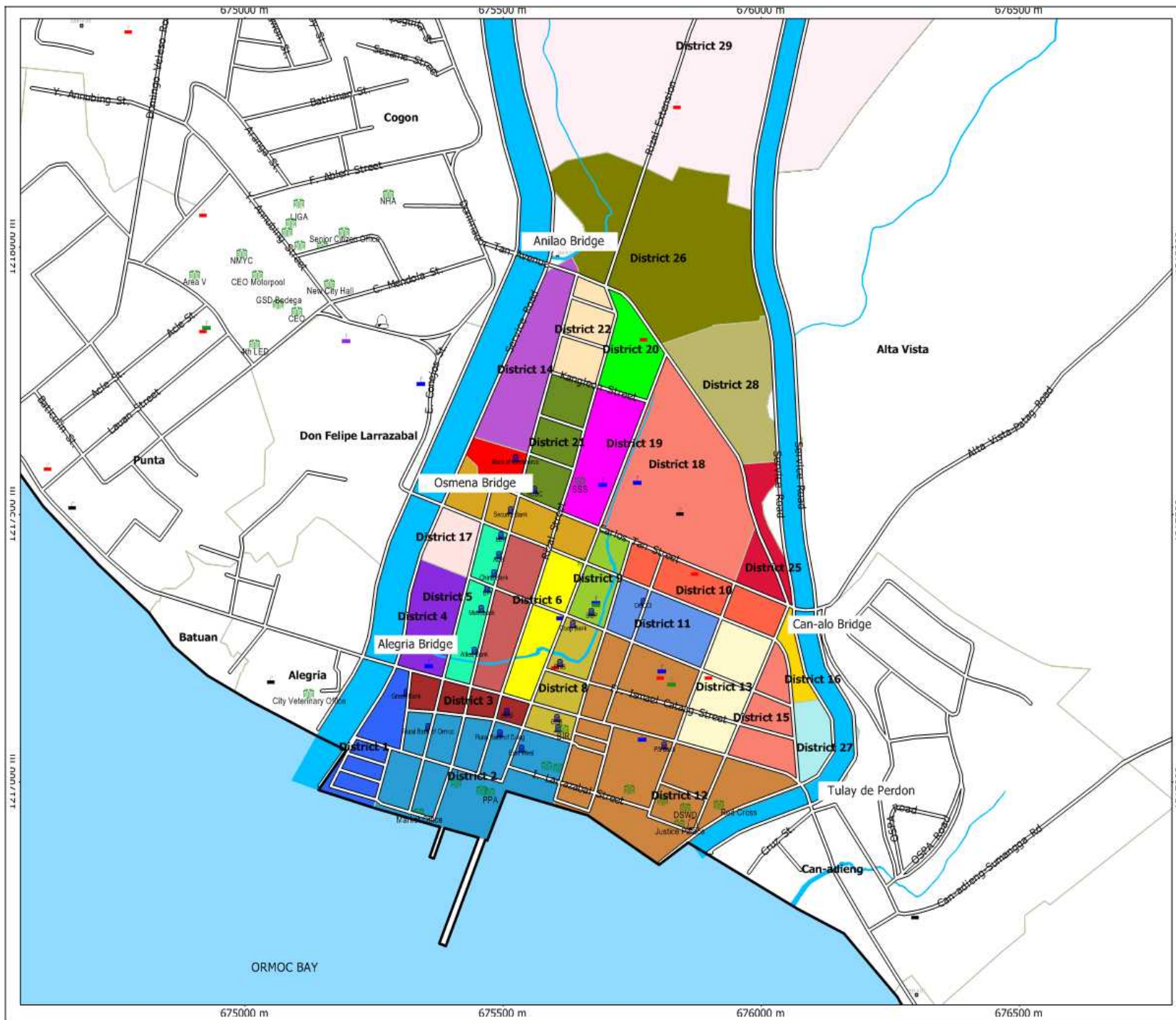
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# ORMOC CITY PROPER



Scale 1:2 000



## LEGEND

- Municipal Boundary
- Barangay Boundary
- National Road
- Road
- Rivers, Creeks
- Water Body
- Public Elementary School
- Private Elementary School
- Public Secondary School
- Private Secondary School
- College
- Banks
- Government Offices

### Data Sources:

Road & River Network from Digital Colorized Orthophoto  
Mosaic of Ormoc City 1997 (Geo-survey & Mapping Inc.)  
Brgy Boundary from Tax Map (Tax Mapping Division)  
Municipal Boundary from Ormoc Cadastre #256

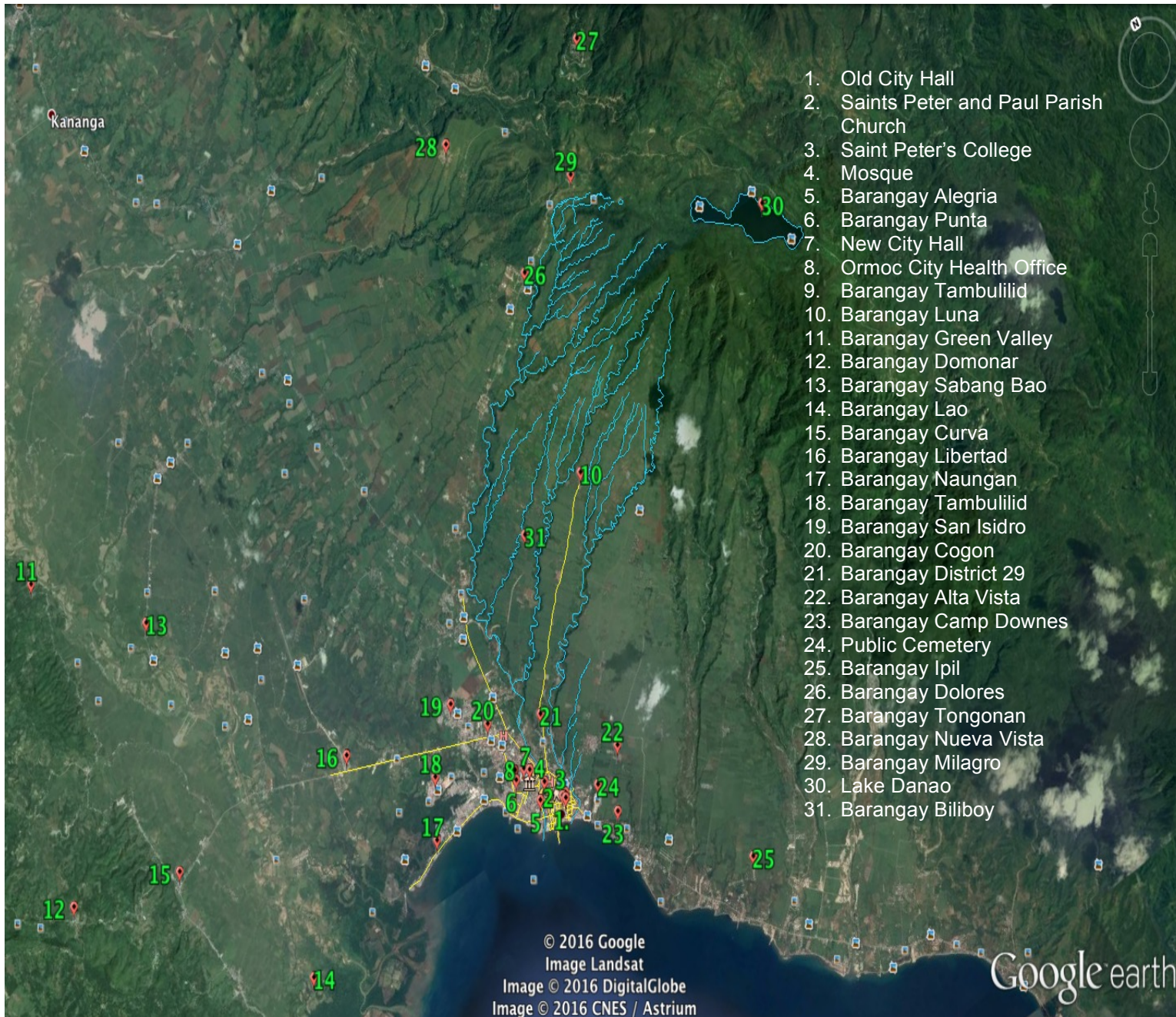
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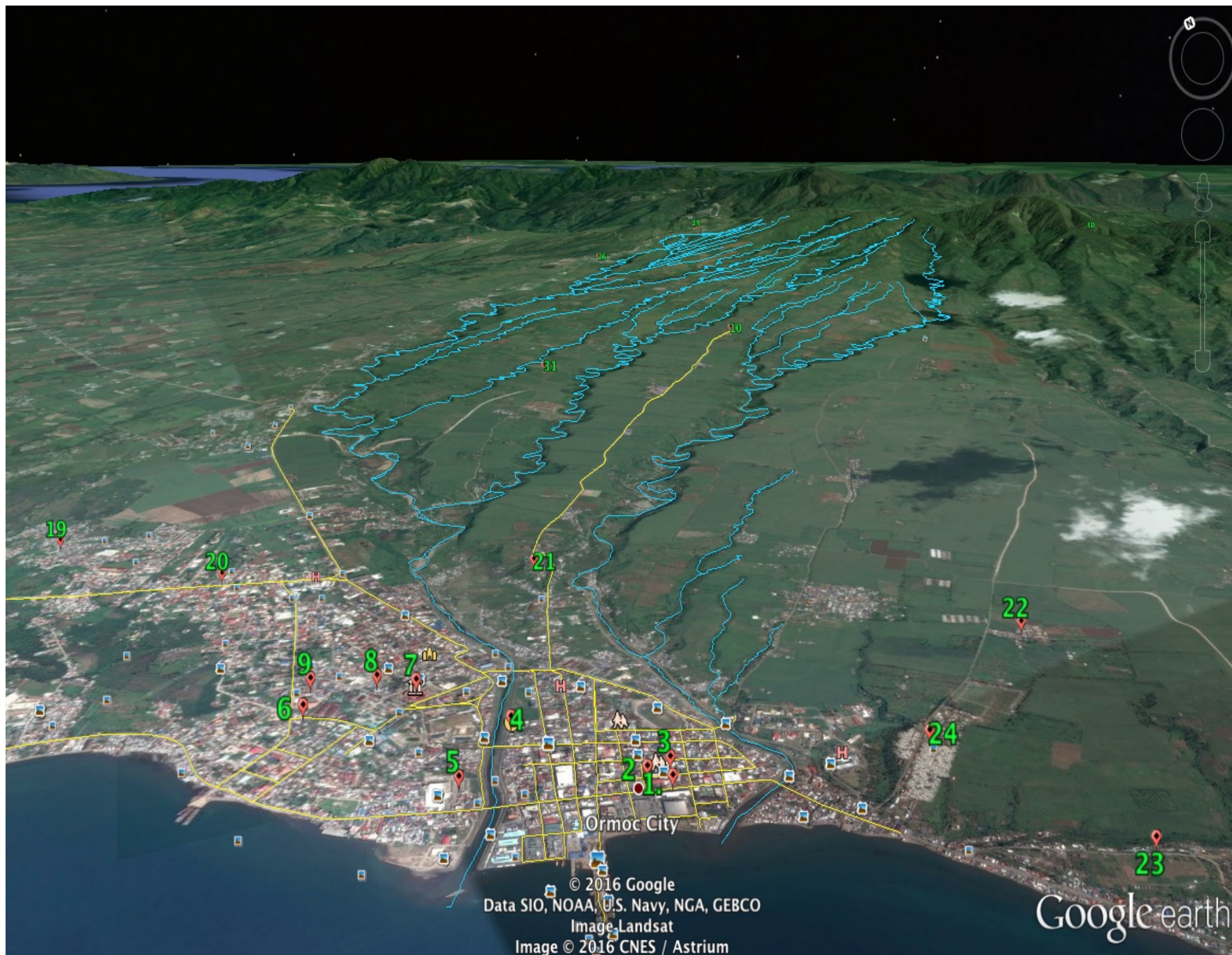
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Map showing the waterways that flush out to Ormoc Bay, with the Barangays that had been flooded, used for resettlement and areas the author had visited





**For Eric and Ava**

## PROLOGUE

### WRATH OF THE RIVERS

*As recalled by the author, the satellite imagery depicting Thelma was unimpressive, i.e., a forecaster might mistakenly expect no serious results from its passage. However, torrential rains dumped an estimated 6 inches of water in 24 hours, as the tropical storm passed over the island of Leyte.*

- F. Williams, G. Jung and R. Engelbretson, *Forecasters Handbook for the Philippine Islands and Surrounding Waters* (Monterey, California: Naval Research Laboratory, 1993), 3-26.

It was eight in the morning of that rainy Tuesday of 5 November 1991 and nine-year old Joan was ecstatic that she did not have to go to school. Like any child who discovers an unexpected holiday, she rejoiced for the typhoon because her mother allowed her to stay home. Quickly, she went down to the Anilao River just a few houses away, and frolicked in the rain with some of the neighborhood children, hardly aware of the river that had always been there since she was born. When she went home, tired and happy, it was about 9:30 a.m. and the rain was steadily pouring.<sup>1</sup>

By quarter to eleven that morning, Buboy, who was twenty-one years old, was still busy checking test papers on the kitchen table, distracted occasionally by the constant sound of the torrential rain like pellets against the jalousies. He looked up now and then at his young wife who was preparing *munggos*<sup>2</sup> for lunch. He was a teacher at Saint Peter's College, only a bike ride away from Barangay Don Felipe where he lived with his family on the ground floor and his wife's parents and sister-in-law at the second floor of the house. In a corner, Bangbang, his fourteen-month old son, slept fitfully. After a few minutes, Buboy detected a change in the tempo of the rain, subtle but disturbing, though not enough to truly alarm him as yet. The Anilao River occasionally flooded after all, but because the house was situated at the top-most end of the river slope hugging the perimeter wall of

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<sup>1</sup> Joan, interview with author, 24 April 2013, in Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino. Interview occurred in the afternoon in Joan's *sari-sari* store in Tambulilid. Her husband, young daughter and son were also present. The *sari-sari* store was packed full with merchandise, and when I arrived, with my interpreter Victor Arcuiño, the couple was busy measuring and packing white sugar.

<sup>2</sup> Bisaya, lit. mung beans sautéed in tomato, onion and garlic, and is popularly eaten with steamed rice.



the Serafica property, he was not unduly concerned. It was unheard of, at least among the residents of Barangay Don Felipe, that the Anilao had ever breached its banks. That day, there was no strong wind, but the rain had become more intense. Suddenly he felt something cold slap against his ankles. There was water pouring in from under the door. It was the color of mud and reeked of a strange, but unmistakable smell of the river.<sup>3</sup>

Just down the Anilao River, also in Barangay Don Felipe, the meandering waters were hemmed in on both sides by a mass of tightly crammed rickety houses made from bamboo, *nipa*, and other light materials. Thirty-nine-year old Elizabeth was putting things away after an early lunch. It was around eleven a.m. A devout woman, she silently thanked God that her husband, a tricycle driver, and her three children, who she had not allowed to go to school that morning because of the typhoon warning, were all at home. She was not yet done with her washing up, when she noticed the Monobloc chairs teetering on the flowing water that had suddenly inundated her kitchen floor. Peering out the window, she was startled to see her ducks floating in a sea that had been their small backyard.<sup>4</sup>

In another part of Ormoc City, in a small two-storey boarding house at the corner of Osmeña and Real Streets, forty-year old Apining, who was enjoying a day off as a saleslady at a popular shoe store called Footsteps, had just finished decorating the house for Christmas. Her husband was dozing inside their rented room, and she debated whether to continue waiting for another housemate who should have been sent home from work by now or go ahead and eat, as she had already finished cooking for lunch. She went to lie down beside her husband, deciding to wait till twelve o'clock. Suddenly, she heard the puzzling sound of surging water. She got up to

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<sup>3</sup> Buboy, interview with author, 4 April 2013, in Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English. This interview occurred in the GK Rotary provincial office in Tambulilid.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth, interview with author, 6 April 2013, at GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino. The interview occurred in her own home around lunchtime, and the author was accompanied by Victor Arcuiño as interpreter. Her house had a small receiving area in front, with grills on the main door.

investigate, and on opening the front door, was immediately drenched. Outside was a sea of water rushing towards her.<sup>5</sup>

Along the Malbasag River running parallel to the Anilao, twenty-six-year old Amparo hastily gathered her children's rubber slippers and secured them atop the *nipa* roof. She shouted to her husband to hurry with his repairs. She was worried that the water was rising much too quickly. She went back inside, threw some clothes into a sack, and hushed the children, one who was almost two and another who was not yet one year old. When she went back outside a few minutes later, she was shocked to see some huge trees and houses tumbling in the floodwaters.<sup>6</sup>

### **Then came the floods**

At about eleven a.m. on 5 November, an hour after the peak of the intense downpour, a surge of floodwaters burst along the tributaries of the Anilao and Malbasag rivers. The bulk of it poured into the city proper and covered approximately a square kilometer of the commercial and residential areas. A flash flood also occurred in other areas like Barangay Nalunopan, which lay slightly above the city proper with an estimated elevation of 114 meters above sea level and where a tributary of the Anilao River also flowed. The Panilahan River in Barangay Ipil also flooded, but it did not cause a flash flood the likes seen along the Anilao and Malbasag that day. In the business district where canals drained straight to Ormoc Bay, the rushing waters picked up velocity, carrying with it the houses lining the riverbanks of the Anilao and Malbasag.

Ronaldo Boy, a nineteen-year old *manunubo*<sup>7</sup> in the sugarcane hacienda of Barangay Nalunopan, struggled to pull his grandmother up the roof. The water had risen quickly, threatening to engulf the *pawud*<sup>8</sup> house. In

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<sup>5</sup> Apining, interview with author, 6 April 2013, at GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya. Interview occurred in Apining's own house at about lunchtime. Victor Arcuiño accompanied the author as interpreter.

<sup>6</sup> Amparo, interview with author, 26 April 2013, at Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino. The interview was undertaken on the front porch of the house.

<sup>7</sup> Bisaya and Filipino, lit. sugarcane laborer.

<sup>8</sup> Bisaya, lit. thatched.

an unbelievable instant, the swirling waters of the Malinawon Creek<sup>9</sup> swallowed the hut, leaving them clinging desperately to the *nipa*<sup>10</sup> roof. The hut was tugged and pulled by the raging waters before it collapsed and flung them into what he thought was a certain death. But he found himself clinging to a clump of nearby bamboo trees, but his grandmother was nowhere to be found.

In Barangay Don Felipe, Buboy had clambered up to the second floor with his parents-in-law, sister-in-law, wife and young son. Soon they heard banging against the *lawanit*<sup>11</sup> walls and voices begging to be let in. Stranded neighbors, some they did not even know or recognize, had crossed over from window to window, watching the same houses they had climbed through tumble into the raging waters like dominoes, until they reached Buboy's house, which was the last one standing. Behind it was a high cement barrier they could not climb over. There were about fifty desperate souls who clambered into the second-floor of Buboy's house. Then the house creaked and groaned against the relentless current of the floodwaters. In an instant Buboy felt it give way, breaking up like flimsy sticks. Amidst desperate prayers and helpless cries, they were all sucked into the surge of mud, debris, felled trees and logs, and animals both dead and alive. With the waters swirling around them, Buboy gripped his wife and son tightly to his chest and swam defiantly, refusing to surrender to the rampaging waters. In a few minutes, the swift-flowing current surprisingly subsided and he could miraculously touch solid ground again. Brimming with an overwhelming sense of thanksgiving, he looked down to set his wife and son on the ground. But he was shocked to find he was gripping tight not his infant son, but a piece of wood. Beside him, his bedraggled wife sobbed, "We have lost Bangbang."<sup>12</sup>

Just a few meters away, also in Barangay Don Felipe, Merlita, a thirty-one-year old housewife, and her husband quickly brought their three children to higher grounds as soon as she noticed water pouring into the house. After

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>10</sup> Filipino and Bisaya, lit. palm.

<sup>11</sup> Bisaya and Filipino, lit. plywood.

<sup>12</sup> Buboy, Ibid.

guiding his family to an elevated area, her husband said he would go back to fetch the day's income amounting to 700 pesos from their *sari-sari*<sup>13</sup> store, which they had left in a rush. Left alone with her three young children—a three-year old daughter who clung under her armpit, a five-year old son she held in her other hand, and a seven-year old boy she urged to hold on tight to her skirt because both her hands were occupied—she was unprepared when a sudden wave came and swept away her seven-year old without a whimper. She could only scream after him uselessly.<sup>14</sup>

In Isla Verde, thirty-eight-year old Solemnisa, who like Merlita had no idea there was a typhoon warning, was caught unawares by the rising Anilao River. She dragged her children to a coconut tree next to their house and secured them there with ropes, one by one, while the waters raged around them. She then climbed up the trunk, where four other people were clinging at the top. But a powerful surge uprooted the tree and flung them all into the brown water. She lost two children that day, one who is still missing today. Her husband, too, remains missing.<sup>15</sup>

### **In the immediate aftermath**

The rain, at least in the mountain barangay of Tongonan, stopped immediately, with no additional rainfall added to the rain gauge. In the city, some local residents claimed that the sun crept out in the afternoon of 5 November, noting that the flashflood itself only took thirty minutes to drain out to Ormoc Bay. Based on footage taken by JA Fotorama that day, a local photo and video shop located in the heart of Ormoc City across the old Philippine National Bank building, people began milling about the city streets immediately after the waters subsided. They exhibited no overweening panic, grief or other emotional outbursts. Yet there was a sense of the surreal as people began to take stock of the dead and the enormous destruction,

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<sup>13</sup> Filipino, lit. a small merchandise store selling miscellaneous items.

<sup>14</sup> Merlita, interview with author, 5 April 2013, at GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino.

<sup>15</sup> Solemnisa, interview with author, 5 April 2013, at GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya. Interview occurred in the GK provincial office in Barangay Tambulilid. Victor Arcuiño, the author's interpreter, was present. Solemnisa's speech was difficult to understand, as she talked quickly.

including drowned babies, women and children, oftentimes stripped naked amidst the mud and flood debris.

Laura, who was vacationing in the Philippines from Australia, lost her mother, sister, several nephews and nieces in a blink of an eye, as well as a three-storey house she had financed for renovations along the Anilao River just seven months before.<sup>16</sup> She herself very nearly drowned. Her brother lost his entire family. Ben, who was in the Philippine Constabulary, was stationed that day in distant Barangay Liberty and had heard of the tragedy from colleagues. He immediately went down to the city, a trek that took him nearly eight hours, only to find his wife, two young children, and parents-in-law missing and a desolate flatland where his house used to be in Barangay Cogon.<sup>17</sup> They, too, all remain missing until today. Elizabeth and her family in what used to be Barangay Don Felipe had finally climbed up a *caimito*<sup>18</sup> tree at the height of Anilao's wrath, while their *pawud* house was swept away. She luckily lost no member of her family, but her cousins and their families who lived closer to the river all perished that day.

Mayor Victoria Locsin was said to have mobilized local government, indeed what little remained of it at that time amidst the chaos, while some of her local officials were nowhere to be found. Unfortunately, no documents or photos exist that can testify to what the local government did, but an interview with a local journalist pointed out that mayor Locsin was already active in coordination efforts around the city. More visible, however, were the relief activities initiated by a private citizen by the name of Eufrocino Codilla Sr, who was a contractor with his own backhoes and trucks and whose daughter-in-law Gwen Garcia was able to successfully connect with Cebu City. In response, Governor Emilio Osmeña of Cebu, sent some food packs and accompanied these by plane to Ormoc in the following days. Another non-publicized personality who was said to be among the first responders,

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<sup>16</sup> Laura, interview with author, 7 June 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in mixed English and Filipino. Interview occurred in the funeral building that her family owned.

<sup>17</sup> Police Constabulary (Retired) Bienvenido Udtohan, interview with author, 8 October 2013 in Barangay San Lorenzo, Ormoc City in Filipino. The interview occurred in the front porch of his house.

<sup>18</sup> Filipino, lit. star apple fruit of the family Sapotaceae native to the Greater Antilles and West Indies, but now grown throughout the tropics, including Southeast Asia.

according to a local journalist, was Baybay Municipality mayor Carmen L. Cari, who with her team gathered all the *pusô*<sup>19</sup> and grilled chicken she could find in Baybay, Leyte, and arrived in Ormoc via pump boat by six p.m. to distribute food aid to city hall employees. Their group left by around eight p.m., motoring out of Ormoc Bay in a hurry. They feared that another small flood might come to cleanse the debris that the major flood had brought, a popular *pamahiin* or local superstitious belief in the aftermath of a flood. For many others, especially in what used to be Isla Verde and Barangays Don Felipe, Alegria, and Malbasag, many went to sleep hungry, terrified, cold, and wet, huddled together with what remained of their families under makeshift tents.

So passed the night after the world ended for so many families in Ormoc City.

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<sup>19</sup> Bisaya, lit. cooked rice inside a palm pouch woven into a triangle or square.

## INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMATIQUE OF THE 1991 ORMOC TRAGEDY

*Experts now say that even before the flood, it should have been obvious that Ormoc was a natural disaster waiting to happen.*

- H. Severino, "Ormoc revisited," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21-22 April 1992.<sup>20</sup>

*The ability to inject humor to an otherwise tragic event is but a glimpse of that distinct trait of Filipinos to laugh at themselves and breeze through adversity.*

- L. Jimenea, "Laughter eases pain of flood victims," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 November 1999, 14.

In the Philippines, disasters are continuing realities. Indeed, Bankoff (2003) counted 702 disasters between 1900 and 1991, leading him to note that the Philippines has a "history of hazard".<sup>21</sup> As such, death, too, is common. With a surging population rate amidst a proliferation of accidents, armed conflicts, landslides, typhoons, floods, volcanic eruptions, fires, earthquakes and senseless crimes, death and disasters are so common they are no longer shocking. They are a normal part of how life unfolds daily in this island world fraught with danger. Not surprisingly, there is a cavalier attitude among Filipinos towards disaster that may seem odd to an outsider who cannot understand how and why ordinary Filipinos can smile and laugh, signs commonly taken to mean 'resilience.' In the media, these outward signs of resilience and coping are often emphasized in the aftermath of natural hazards that commonly occur one after another.

Nowhere were these thoughts more prevalent than when I started researching a twenty-two-year old flood in 2013. The story of the Ormoc tragedy is riddled with contradictions that defy a simple cause and effect explanation. Ormoc, relatively unknown to the rest of the country before 1991, became an overnight phenomenon for all the wrong reasons. It has the

<sup>20</sup> Re-published by the *Philippine Center on Investigative Journalism* (Online).

<sup>21</sup> G. Bankoff, *Cultures of Disaster, Society and Natural Hazards in the Philippines* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), especially Chapter 3, "A history of hazard in the Philippines," 31-60.

dubious distinction of being referred to as *that* city where thousands perished from a rogue typhoon that triggered deadly floods. In 1991, public discourse focused on why it happened at all. A meteorological explanation was adopted in the immediate flood aftermath by the Philippine government blaming nature, calling the tragedy “an unprecedented event which occurs only once in fifty (50) years.”<sup>22</sup>

The common view of floods is that they are a ‘natural’ phenomenon, only one among many other hazards. Indeed, from the perspective of the World Bank, disasters are natural. They strike repeatedly and with frequent periodicity in some parts of the world. The World Bank also believes that it is now possible to predict “where an event will likely occur at some time in the near future (but not precisely when or its magnitude).”<sup>23</sup> In another publication, while insisting that “[f]loods are natural phenomena,” it noted that the causes of flooding may be either natural or man-made. Commonly, it says, they are caused by a combination of “meteorological and hydrological extremes, such as extreme precipitation and flows.”<sup>24</sup> But floods, the World Bank further adds, can also occur “as a result of human activities,” like “unplanned growth and development in floodplains, or from the breach of a dam or the overtopping of an embankment that fails to protect planned developments.”<sup>25</sup> The foregoing arguments have important implications on what programs and policies can be funded. For the World Bank, the priority is clearly to ameliorate disaster impacts through post-disaster programs. On the downside, however, the argument that floods are ‘natural’ occurrences implicitly denies the need to identify underlying political and socio-economic issues that are central to sustainable and meaningful solutions. Mitigation programs that are commonly supported by major funding organizations, such as the World Bank, are those that deal with issues that are least politically

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<sup>22</sup> Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group, *Scientific Assessment Report: Ormoc City flood on 5 November 1991*, Unpublished report (Department of Science and Technology (DOST) 1991), 1.

<sup>23</sup> World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, *Hazards of Nature, Risks to Development, An IEG Evaluation of World Bank Assistance for Natural Disasters* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank 2006), 24.

<sup>24</sup> A. Jha and J. Lamond, *Cities and Flooding: A Guide to Integrated Urban Flood Risk Management for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/International Development Association or the World Bank, 2012), 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



sensitive, such as infrastructure development, relocation and housing of vulnerable communities, sanitation, etc. These programs do not need to delve too deeply into the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions that characterize society, such as elite politics, marginalization, poverty and vulnerability. As such, mitigation programs often espouse technocratic approaches that are measurable and deemed effective based on identified objectives that aim to return an area that has been devastated by a natural hazard to business-as-usual as soon as possible.

However, in the context of developing countries, a discussion on floods does not only revolve around the impacts on people's lives, livelihood and coping mechanisms. More importantly, it asks why disasters happen, which go beyond the meteorological and hydrological explanations into more problematic economic and socio-political issues that obviously cannot be resolved quickly, if at all. Unlike earthquakes, storm surges, tsunamis and typhoons that have clear origins in 'nature' and as such are often mitigated technocratically, floods are a clear consequence of society. If disasters are 'products of a society than of a specific nature,'<sup>26</sup> floods are particularly true of this statement. Forest denudation, river and waterway siltation, construction of settlements both legal and illegal along major waterways, conversion of land from forest to residential, industrial and commercial areas, agricultural over-cultivation in the hinterlands to meet increasing urban demand—in short a country's pursuit of economic growth—all these factors contribute to the increasing occurrence and magnitude of the impacts of floods.

In urban settings, the problem becomes more acute. Floods and the catastrophe they bring about expose festering social, economic and political inequalities. In an instant, these inequalities that had taken many decades to crystallize are brought to the fore in the event of major hazards that transform into disasters. Pelling (2003) argues that "cities [are] sites of disaster" firstly because, in countries with colonial pasts, they had been

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<sup>26</sup> A. Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing vulnerability in a globalized world: A political ecological perspective," in *Mapping Vulnerability, Disasters, Development and People*, ed. G. Bankoff, G. Frerks and D. Hilhorst (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2004), 11.

established on coasts that are increasingly exposed to hazards.<sup>27</sup> Secondly, urbanization is itself a self-reflexive process with cities increasingly adopting policies that often lead to their own possible destruction. One such policy is land-use programs converting forest areas for industrial and residential purposes. Thirdly, the lack of regulation among “peripheral settlements at risk” “is often a symptom of piecemeal urban development and a lack of strategic planning.”<sup>28</sup> As such, subpar housing patterns in urban slums, for example, are the norm, which are highly susceptible to the effects of natural hazards. Lastly, poverty in urban areas is commonly not prioritized, which has resulted in the exclusion of the urban poor from sustainable development. For many urban poor dwellers in the Philippines, life has become “cheap” because of routinized risks they are forced to accept in everyday life. Certainly in Ormoc City in 1991, Isla Verde—that illegal settlement established in the mouth of the Anilao River and which had been totally “washed out”<sup>29</sup>—became the quintessential example of political and socio-economic inequalities. That some 2,500 residents over the years were able to construct semi- and permanent homes in a high risk area without effective government regulation before the flood raises serious questions about the nature of landlessness, urban poverty, and failed governance. The increasing urbanization process with its attendant developmental concerns, coupled with the geographic character of Ormoc City as a water basin, predisposed it to unnatural disasters<sup>30</sup>, notably widespread floods. A tragedy was simply waiting to happen. From this perspective of the unnatural nature of floods of the late twentieth century, the 1991 Ormoc flood could not have been an act of God. Yet why should the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in 1991 insist on the imposition of the ‘nature’ argument, only to retract it weeks later by issuing a statement that the flash

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<sup>27</sup> M. Pelling, *The Vulnerability of Cities, Natural Disasters and Social Resilience* (London and Sterling VA: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2003), Chapter 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Term commonly used to refer to Isla Verde and the Ormoc flood survivors, denoting the act of having been stripped to zero, both figuratively and physically.

<sup>30</sup> See discussion on “unnatural disasters” by J. Abramovitz, “Unnatural disasters,” in *Worldwatch Paper 158*, ed. L. Starke (Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Institute, October 2001).

flood was caused by illegal logging?<sup>31</sup> If the illegal logging argument espoused by local officials and Ormoc victim-survivors was the leading public discourse at the time, why had there been no lasting policies from that phenomenon?

Flooding in rural agricultural areas also touches upon other key areas of development. These include food security, agricultural losses, land tenure, and, in the case of the Philippines where 30 per cent of the labor force is in the agricultural sector,<sup>32</sup> crucial livelihood issues. The concerns of sugarcane laborers prior to, during and after the 1991 flood, especially in Barangay Nalunopan<sup>33</sup> in Ormoc City where a disproportionate number of deaths also occurred, highlight similarities in the concerns of urban flood survivors, such as land tenure, employment insecurity, poverty and marginalization, and persistent vulnerability. Contrary to the urban poor communities that had been adversely affected in 1991, however, sugarcane laborer communities have historically experienced higher rates of poverty and vulnerability because of the fact that their employment in plantations places them in patron-client relationships with their employers that necessarily limit involvement by the national and local government. It is notable, for example, that plantation owners primarily facilitate the construction of roads in community clusters of laborer families within plantations. Again, in the matter of combating child labor in sugarcane plantations in general, government intervention programs remain a challenge of implementation, as parents bring their children to the plantations to help augment family income while plantation owners themselves do not enforce anti-child labor laws.<sup>34</sup> Yet, what is surprising is the historical lack of overt resistance in Ormoc among sugarcane laborers against plantation owners. Indeed, armed insurgencies had been few—those acts that demand a change in the status quo that privileged only a handful of families, similar to what occurred in Negros

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, “DENR admits: Ormoc tragedy caused by forest denudation,” *The Philippine Free Press* 83:48, 30 November 1991, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority. *Technical notes on the labor force survey (LFS)*. Republic of the Philippines, accessed 4 May 2012 (Online).

<sup>33</sup> Nalunopan is a pseudonym. In Bisaya, it means an area that was flooded.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, C. Lim, “Special report: Beyond the fields (Second of Three Parts),” *SunStar Cebu*, 24 June 2015 (Online); and, Kyung Lah, “Life not sweet for Philippines’ sugar cane child workers,” *CNN*, 2 May 2012 (Online).

Occidental in the late 1980s during the fall of sugar prices. Why have there been no apparent resistance in post-1991 Ormoc? Surely, a disaster such as the 1991 tragedy could have served as a powerful catalyst for social and political change against oppressive economic and socio-political conditions.

### **Vulnerability and disaster**

The discourse on floods in Ormoc is intimately linked to vulnerability. For Cannon (1994), vulnerability is “a characteristic of individuals and groups of people who inhabit a given natural, social and economic space, within which they are differentiated according to their varying position in society into more or less vulnerable individuals and groups.”<sup>35</sup> Wisner et al (2004) add that, “This vulnerability [of different groups of people] is determined by social systems and power, not by natural forces.”<sup>36</sup> Key markers that influence the level of vulnerability experienced by individuals, families or communities encompass “class (which includes differences in wealth), occupation, caste, ethnicity, gender, disability and health status, age and discrimination status (whether ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’), and the nature and extent of social network.”<sup>37</sup> As such, a combination of these factors result in varying levels of vulnerability, with some individuals and families rendered more vulnerable than others.

Yet vulnerability is not static. Nor is it a one-off condition that characterizes only present life situations. The role that history plays in shaping vulnerability has been shown to be vital: “Vulnerability is not just concerned with the present or the future but is equally, and intimately, a product of the past.”<sup>38</sup> Historical factors have resulted not only in the marginalization of particular groups in a society, but also in the adoption and implementation of “environmentally unsustainable development projects over time.”<sup>39</sup> Vulnerability has been primarily conceived as political in character

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<sup>35</sup> T. Cannon, “Vulnerability and the explanation of ‘natural’ disasters,” in *Disasters, Development and Environment*, ed. A. Varley (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto and Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), 19.

<sup>36</sup> B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon and I. Davis, *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> G. Bankoff and D. Hilhorst, “Introduction: Mapping Vulnerability,” in *Mapping Vulnerability, Disasters, Development and People*, ed. G. Bankoff, G. Frerks, and D. Hilhorst (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2004), 8-9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

because it can best be understood as a lack of development.<sup>40</sup> It shares the same weakness with other Western approaches that adopt a particularly

'top-down' approach to disaster management which tends to disempower communities by characterizing them as 'victims' and 'passive recipients' from a paternalistic and authoritative perspective.<sup>41</sup>

It has also been argued to be political-ecological in nature because of its material and social constructions, often conflicting, that define societal risk according to the dictates of social, political and economic practices and institutions.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, "[a]sking why disasters happen is a political question; but understanding how they occur is a social and historical one."<sup>43</sup> Given the close interlinking of the past and present in the construction of systemic vulnerability, who were these vulnerable individuals and families in Ormoc prior to 1991 and how did they manage their lives amidst such marginalization? If, as Susman, O'Keefe and Wisner (1983) argue, the condition of marginality is not a consequence of the marginal group itself but of the relationship it has with other classes and interest groups in society,<sup>44</sup> where is the human agency of the marginalized group in these circumstances?

Vulnerability, unfortunately, is a difficult and cumbersome concept to use. This despite being recognized and applied by such humanitarian institutions as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC and RCS), which notes that "[t]he concept is relative and

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<sup>40</sup> O. Cardona, "The need for rethinking the concepts of vulnerability and risk from a holistic perspective: A necessary review and criticism for effective risk management," in *Mapping Vulnerability, Disasters, Development and People*, ed. G. Bankoff, G. Frerks and D. Hilhorst (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2004), 49.

<sup>41</sup> Sharma and Palakuyidil do not specifically equate this statement with the vulnerability approach, but the description of this "top-down" approach is apt for how vulnerability has been understood in disaster management practice. A. Sharma and T. Palakuyidil, "The lessons in Gujarat," in *Facing Up to the Storm, How Local Communities Can Cope From Disaster: Lessons from Orissa and Gujarat*, ed. T. Palakuyidil and M. Todd (New Delhi: Christian Aid 2003), 27.

<sup>42</sup> A. Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing vulnerability in a globalized world: A political ecological perspective," in *Mapping Vulnerability, Disasters, Development and People*, ed. G. Bankoff, G. Frerks and D. Hilhorst (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan 2004), 10-11.

<sup>43</sup> G. Bankoff and D. Hilhorst, "Introduction: Mapping Vulnerability," 4.

<sup>44</sup> P. Susman, P. O'Keefe and B. Wisner, "Global disasters, a radical interpretation," in *Interpretations of Calamity from the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, ed. K. Hewitt (Boston, London and Sydney: Allen and Unwin, Inc. 1983), 276-280.

dynamic.”<sup>45</sup> The difficulty stems from its blurring with the concept of poverty. While not all poor people are deemed vulnerable, the most vulnerable are often the poorest in a community. During the intervention stage in a major humanitarian crisis, is it even practical or necessary to delineate between the vulnerable and the poor for strategic planning? Vulnerability is also a term appropriated and assigned mainly by experts and specialists. Thus, there is the danger of imposing knowledge and expertise based on best practices distilled from other emergency cases that may actually be insensitive to the sensibilities and needs of local culture. These concerns prompted me in the beginning of my work to adopt a more limited definition of vulnerability using the livelihood perspective proposed by Wisner et al (2004). They define livelihood as “the command an individual, family or other social groups has over an income and/or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs.”<sup>46</sup> Following this definition, five types of capital were looked at: “human capital or skills, knowledge, health and energy; social capital or networks, groups, and institutions; physical capital or infrastructure, technology and equipment; financial or savings and credit; and, natural capital or natural resources, land, water, fauna and flora.”<sup>47</sup> This more inclusive definition of vulnerability was certainly an attempt to accommodate individual idealization of what constituted personal, familial and communal security cognizant of people’s free will and initiative. Yet, once intervention programs such as resettlement housing had been accomplished in the aftermath of a disaster, as had happened in post-1991 Ormoc, do previously ‘vulnerable’ individuals, families and communities automatically transition to ‘security’ as opposed to vulnerability, even though they technically remain poor? Is there then a real distinction between vulnerability and poverty? Interestingly, most respondents after the 1991 Ormoc tragedy did not view themselves as vulnerable, even after twenty-two years since 1991. In an era where local knowledge and cultural nuances have attained primary importance in identifying mitigation and development programs and policies

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<sup>45</sup> “What is vulnerability?” International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC and RCS) (Online, accessed 2 May 2013).

<sup>46</sup> B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon and I. Davis, *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People’s Vulnerability and Disasters*, 96.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

that work, these considerations have implications on how victim-survivors themselves imagine and shape their lives and destinies vis-à-vis political-economic and cultural institutions. Indeed, contrary to the image of helplessness and powerlessness that the notion of vulnerability projects, victim-survivors of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy have exercised to varying degrees active involvement in their own future survival, in ways that were both creative and rational. They had utilized even those acts, such as rumors, stories, jokes, gestures, etc., common in any community that could be labelled as covert acts of resistance and discontent, or what Scott (1985) refers to as 'weapons of the weak.'<sup>48</sup>

### **What accountability?**

In the aftermath of disasters, the quest to investigate its causes and assign accountability quickly follows the relief and rehabilitation stage. The objective is to advocate reforms to improve policies and institutions of governance. Politically, this stage is the most unstable, as political rivals and other competing institutions commonly use the opportunity to blame others and shape the discourse according to their interests. Criticism and blame are common issues in the media in the aftermath of a crisis, with questions revolving around why it happened, what the government is doing, and what could have prevented it from happening, questions that appear factual but have deeper implications on apportioning blame. It is no surprise then that during disaster situations, winners and losers as well as heroes and villains are created not only among direct and peripheral victim-survivors, but also more importantly among political actors. Accountability, according to Boin et al (2008) "is mainly about looking back and judging the performance of people."<sup>49</sup> It is not often a "routine, ritualistic exercise", but rather involves a variety of mechanisms imbued with formal or informal power to "interrogate, debate with and sanction political decision makers."<sup>50</sup> This is where forums,

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<sup>48</sup> J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak, Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>49</sup> A. Boin, A. McConnell and P. t'Hart, "Governing After Crisis," in *Governing After Crisis, The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning*, ed. A. Boin, A. McConnell and P. t'Hart (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, Sao Paulo, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 11.

including the courts, media, parliaments and auditors can make political decision makers accountable for their actions, a process common to developed countries where the society itself expects an inward-looking mechanism to ensure that a crisis does not re-occur. But it is not necessarily true for developing countries such as the Philippines, where the quest for accountability of public institutions and officials is often the least priority, and often a non-priority, in disaster aftermath.

It must also be noted here that the November 1991 Ormoc tragedy occurred at a time so nearing Christmas, which may partly explain why there was no sense of sustained public outrage despite the disturbing images of horror published in major dailies at that time. Grisly footage of bloated corpses was shown floating in Ormoc Bay or fished out as far as the Camotes Islands and Bohol. While the images were highly unnerving, national consciousness was preoccupied with other pressing matters. It is indicative that, on 6 November 1991, when the country had not yet woken to the awful reality of the disaster in Ormoc City, the newspaper *Malaya* ran a story on the “[r]ise in illegal logging cases [being] blamed on pols”<sup>51</sup>. The political climate in 1991 was already highly volatile. Emerging from the martial law dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos, government agencies including the DENR were yet in 1991 unable to shed their reputation as instruments of massive corruption. The Aquino administration was also battling armed challenges to her presidency, as attempted military coups became a way of life for military opportunists and adventurers. Just over a year before, on 16 July 1990, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake rocked northern Luzon, killing at least 1300 people, injuring at least 3,000 and causing an estimated 12.2 to 16 billion pesos in infrastructure damages (\$488 to 640 million).<sup>52</sup> Then on 15 June 1991, the long-dormant Mount

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<sup>51</sup> C. Pablo, “Rise in illegal logging cases blamed on pols,” *Malaya* 10:293, 6 November 1991, 6.

<sup>52</sup> R.L. Sharpe, “July 14, 1990 Luzon (Philippines) earthquake,” in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Conference on Earthquake Engineering, Madrid, Spain, 19-24 July 1992*, Vol. 11, ed. A. Bernal (Rotterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1994), 7027-7031 (Online); G. Rantucci, *Geological Disasters in the Philippines: The July 1990 Earthquake and the June 1991 Eruption of Mount Pinatubo, Description, Effects and Lessons Learned* (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate General for Development Cooperation, and Presidenza Del Consiglio Dei Ministri, Dipartimento Per L’Informazione E L’Editoria 1994); and, G. Bankoff, *Cultures of*



Pinatubo erupted in what would become the second largest volcanic eruption of the twentieth century. Eight hundred people were killed with more than one million others displaced from their homes. Agricultural, infrastructural and personal property damages were estimated at 10.1 billion pesos (approximately \$374 million) in 1991, and an additional 1.9 billion pesos (\$69 million) in 1992.<sup>53</sup>

While an exceptional, albeit trying, human drama was playing out in that small Leyte city in the weeks following the deluge in November 1991, a more politically critical event was unfolding in Manila. In the halls of power and diplomacy in Malacañang, the United States received its marching orders on 6 December 1991 to vacate Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay Naval Complex, with a provision to complete the withdrawal in one year. No wonder that President Cory Aquino lamented after the Ormoc tragedy that there was a “surfeit of calamities.”<sup>54</sup>

Locally, the debate on who was to blame for the Ormoc tragedy in 1991 took two clear sides. On one side was the government (notably the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the DENR) in a defensive mode, espousing a scientific approach. On the other side were the media and local government, which blamed illegal logging. Predictably, though public outrage had been palpable in the month following the flood and the ‘blame game’ had dragged several personalities into the heated discussions played out in the media, no lasting and direct impact upon policies had come out of that tragedy. Despite the blame game that ran its course in November 1991, the quest for accountability had been superficial and no one was prosecuted at the national level. It is clear though that in November 1991, the media was the most powerful entity to shape public opinion. When it diverted its attention to the politically explosive US Bases

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*Disaster, Society and Natural Hazard in the Philippines* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon 2003), 63-66.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, J.-C. Gaillard, “Alternative paradigms of volcanic risk perception: The case of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines,” *ScienceDirect*, Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research Vol. 172 (Elsevier B.V., 2008), 315-328; E. De Guzman, “Eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in June 1991” (Kobe, Japan: Asian Disaster Reduction Center, 2017) (Online).

<sup>54</sup> C. Estrella, “Why this surfeit of calamities,” *Malaya* 10:296, 9 November 1991, 1 and 6.

issue that was still hot until its complete closure on 24 November 1992, the plight of Ormoc and its people began to lose appeal. The year 1992 was also election season. Thus, despite the sharply analytical series of articles written by the investigative journalist Howie Severino for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, for example, which uncovered for the first time the culpability of sugarcane planters in the November 1991 flood,<sup>55</sup> nothing substantial in way of legislation or even token resignations by primary characters in this unnatural disaster came out of the exposés and inquiries pursued in the media. By 1994, news articles would go so far as to claim that the “[w]ounds of [the] Ormoc disaster was heal[ing] after 3 years,”<sup>56</sup> and that “Ormoc after 3 years [had] ‘[n]o other way to go but up.’”<sup>57</sup> By 1995, the tone had shifted perceptibly: “Memories of killer flood start to fade,”<sup>58</sup> and “Ormoc disaster [is] [a] city rising from tragedy.”<sup>59</sup> From then onwards, post-disaster Ormoc issues were published only intermittently, signalling a waning national interest in the face of other and more urgent issues about Ormoc, such as illegal logging,<sup>60</sup> land tenure,<sup>61</sup> insurgency,<sup>62</sup> agrarian reform policies,<sup>63</sup> flood

<sup>55</sup> See H. Severino, “Ormoc revisited,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21-22 April 1992, re-published in *Philippine Center on Investigative Journalism* (Online); H. Severino, “Ormoc tragedy: Gov’t hands tied on reforestation,” *Malaya* 11:95, 20 April 1992, 1 and 12; and, H. Severino, “Ormoc tragedy: Stage set for a repeat,” *Malaya* 11:94, 20 April 1992, 1 and 2.

<sup>56</sup> A. Canturias, “Wounds of Ormoc disaster heal after 3 years,” *The Manila Times* 36: 306, 5 November 1994, 1 and 6.

<sup>57</sup> E. Benedicto, “Ormoc after 3 years: ‘No other way to go but up,’” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 9:332, 4 November 1994, 1 and 7.

<sup>58</sup> E. Benedicto, “Ormoc City revisited: Memories of killer flood start to fade,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 10:331, 5 November 1995, 19.

<sup>59</sup> E. Benedicto, “Ormoc disaster: A city rising from tragedy,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 10:332, 6 November 1995, 18.

<sup>60</sup> E. Justimbaste, “Court drops illegal logging case vs Ormoc mayor,” *Philippine News and Features* 12 (Quezon City: Crossroads Publication 20 January 1996), 18; and, E. Justimbaste, “Ormoc mayor’s son hiding more hot lumber?” *Philippine News and Features* 12 (Quezon City: Crossroads Publications 15 June 1996), 13.

<sup>61</sup> E. Justimbaste “Ormoc farmers put up barricades vs PNOC,” *Philippine News and Features* 12 (Quezon City: Crossroads Publications 26 January 1996), 13; and, E. Justimbaste, “Farmers, landowners fight over hilly Ormoc farms,” *Philippine News and Features* 12 (Quezon City: Crossroads Publications 27 January 1996), 14.

<sup>62</sup> L. Jimenea, “NPA courier nabbed in Ormoc City,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 13:148, 7 May 1998, 13; and, “Five killed in NPA ambush in Ormoc,” *Philippine Star* 18:243, 27 March 2004, 1 and 2.

<sup>63</sup> L. Jimenea, “War of beneficiaries: Tension grips Ormoc land put under CARP,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 15:80, 26 February 2000, 12; “CARP no threat to sugar industry, says DAR,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 15:72, 18 February 2000, 16.

infrastructure projects,<sup>64</sup> and agricultural issues.<sup>65</sup> Today, the 1991 Ormoc tragedy is a small footnote whenever a new disaster occurs, and there have been numerous.<sup>66</sup> Surprisingly, however, no political family in Ormoc bore the responsibility or mark of that tragedy. The same elite families jockeyed for positions at subsequent local and regional elections.

Boin et al (2008) argue that public leaders and agencies face three distinct challenges in the aftermath of a disaster (or crisis, as they refer to it).<sup>67</sup> First, the issue that has attracted the most academic and practical attention is the “actual emergency response” that aims to address logistical, institutional and psychosocial needs. Second, the ability to control the “definition of the situation” becomes paramount for the government to undertake public information and dissemination about what it is doing and what people might expect. Third and the most challenging for public policy makers, managing the ‘fallout’ of the crisis implies “searching for resources to pay for damages, fighting judicial battles, coping with the onslaught of criticism that it has evoked, but also exploiting the possibilities a crisis offers.”<sup>68</sup> In Ormoc after the deluge, the actual emergency response did invite public censure, as rumours of hoarding and inefficient aid distribution and delivery began to surface days after the disaster.<sup>69</sup> Criticism became serious enough for President Aquino to admit the lack of coordination among government agencies, but deny the diversion of goods to local government

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<sup>64</sup> S.J. Vanzi, “P676-M anti-flood projects finished in Ormoc,” *Newsflash, Philippine Headline News Online*, 23 April 1999 (Online); J. Arnaiz, “P140-M Ormoc water project hits snag,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 18:305, 11 October 2003, A17.

<sup>65</sup> J. Arnaiz, “NIA restores irrigation in Ormoc farms,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 16:201, 29 June 2001, 17.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, B. Ellorin, “Sendong may not yet be CDO’s Ormoc-like disaster, says expert,” *Mindanao News*, 22 January 2012 (Online); T. Regencia, “Philippine typhoon destroys homes and lives,” *AlJazeera*, 11 November 2013 (Online).

<sup>67</sup> Boin, McConnell and t’Hart, “Governing After Crisis,” 8-9. Boin et al differentiate between disaster and crisis. They define disaster as “typically, but not universally, fined in terms of an episode that is collectively construed very harmful,” which may “fall within the category of natural forces,” such as floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes (42). Crisis, on the other hand, is “...when a community of people—an organization, a town or a nation—perceives an urgent threat to core values or life-sustaining functions, which must be dealt with under conditions of uncertainty” (Ibid.). Not all crises, however, can develop into disasters.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, “No cholera epidemic-Bengzon,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 341:6, 14 November 1991, 1 and 12; “Cory denies diversion of relief goods,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 342:6, 15 November 1991, 1 and 10.

units (or LGUs).<sup>70</sup> In regard to the second instance, discourse about the disaster in Ormoc had been appropriated from the very beginning by the national government so that, at least from the media's perspective, it was a problem of the national government. This was logical, as the Local Government Code,<sup>71</sup> so newly enacted that year was not yet fully implemented by November 1991, and all executive functions including relief were still in national hands. As a result, the local government headed by mayor Victoria Locsin of the powerful Larrazabal clan was not as visible in the media as national government agencies and personalities. Lastly, at the local level, it would appear that the fallout of the disaster was the defeat of mayor Locsin during the May 1992 elections to a neophyte, Eufrocino Codilla Sr, who was a businessman with interests in timber and construction. But she was able to make a comeback after winning as representative of the fourth district of Ormoc City and sitting at the Eleventh Congress from 1998 to 2001. She had simply exchanged places with her husband, Carmelo Locsin, who became mayor from July 2001 to June 2004. In a subsequent hotly contested election, Victoria Locsin was pushed out of a second term in Congress in 2001 when the Supreme Court ruled en banc in favor of Codilla in an election disqualification case.<sup>72</sup> For many Ormocanons, this electoral upset was a direct consequence of the November tragedy, which greatly benefited Codilla while becoming Locsin's political disadvantage. Codilla's winning streak buoyed him through three terms as mayor followed by another three terms as congressman, an impressive total of eighteen years in an elected capacity from 1992 to 2010. His son Eric Codilla continued this trend by taking the helm from Carmelo Locsin in 2004 and sitting as mayor of Ormoc City for a total of nine years or three terms. He failed to duplicate his

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<sup>70</sup> "Cory denies diversion of relief goods," Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> The Local Government Code of 1991 was enacted "to provide for a more responsive and accountable local government structure instituted through a system of decentralization with effective mechanisms of recall, initiative, and referendum, allocate among the different government units their powers, responsibilities, and resources, and provide for the qualifications, election, appointment and removal, term, salaries, powers and functions and duties of local officials, and all other matters relating to the organization and operation of local units."

<sup>72</sup> Eufrocino Codilla, Sr. garnered 71,350 votes during the 14 May 2001 elections against Victoria Locsin's 53,447 votes. However, he was disqualified by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) for soliciting votes, in violation of Section 68 (a) of the Omnibus Election Code.

father's success, however, when a neophyte by the name of Lucy Torres-Gomez of the *hacendero* family the Torreses triumphed in the May 2013 congressional elections. Her husband, the Philippine actor Richard Gomez who was running for mayor against another Codilla scion, Edward "Ondo", however, lost even with support from the Locsins/Larrazabals.<sup>73</sup> At the vice mayor level, the Locsins scored a political victory when a neophyte, their son Leo Carmelo 'Toto' Locsin Jr., won against two other candidates in 2013.

Boin et al (2008) further argue that there are three possible but distinct outcomes for leaders in the aftermath of crisis-induced accountability. First, *elite reinvigoration* may occur when leaders are able to enhance their general stature in the public eye, "because they accept, in a timely and graceful fashion, responsibility for mistakes made."<sup>74</sup> Second, a crisis may result in *elite damage* when incumbent leaders suffer from political credibility, which may cause their public ratings to take a downturn or even a downfall in some cases. Third, *elite escape* occurs when the crisis is not perceived as having made any difference and is instead absorbed into other and more urgent issues. It is interesting that other local officials in post-1991 Ormoc had also been largely saved from the process of blaming, in part because of the inordinate media attention focused upon illegal logging that later expanded to include other areas of the Philippines and other personalities that did not have a connection with the Ormoc flood. In fact, as the example of Nepomuceno Aparis I shows, who was vice mayor in 1991, but who had also been largely unremarkable during the relief and rehabilitation stages, there was no political stigma in the aftermath of the 1991 tragedy. Aparis was able to triumph in two different elected capacities, when he ran and won as a popular city councillor, a post he held in the interim years when he wasn't sitting as vice mayor.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Richard Gomez finally won the mayoral elections in 2016 after a failed bid at becoming Ormoc mayor in 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Boin, McConnel and t'Hart, "Governing After Crisis," 13.

<sup>75</sup> The track record of Nepomuceno Aparis I in an elected capacity is fascinating. A lawyer by profession, he was a provincial prosecutor before running for city councillor prior to becoming vice mayor in 1989. After a hiatus of six years, he ran again and won as councillor for two terms, in 1998 and 2001. After finishing his term as councillor, he ran and won as vice mayor in 2004 and served for two terms. In 2013, he ran not for a third term as vice mayor, perhaps to give way to Carmelo 'Toto' Locsin, but as councillor, for which he won

As confusing as these events appear, how does disaster impact local politics, if indeed it does? The more disturbing question is this: If political leadership can be the most visible sign of change in a post-disaster setting, but the political actors remain the same as before a major disaster, what does this say about the voters who were also to varying levels the victim-survivors? Indeed, as local politics show in the case of Ormoc after November 1991, elite politics is insulated from the political effects of disaster. In an autonomous city like Ormoc—characterized by elite families that had consolidated their power through a monopoly of land and resources for over a century—a disaster even at the scale of the 1991 flash flood had not been able to change the socio-economic and political status quo.

### **“Crisis-induced learning” and the infrastructural response**

Boin et al (2008) differentiate learning from accountability by defining the former as “more about looking forward and improving the performance of structures and arrangements.”<sup>76</sup> Both accountability and learning can propel “social catharsis” if the post-recovery momentum—triggered by the process of collective introspection through sustained media coverage and deepened through formal and legal discussions involving government institutions—is maximized by political actors and institutions. The ideal in learning from major crises is to identify what went wrong and how to ensure that it won’t happen again or if it does recur, that it won’t be as bad as the last one. In post-1991 Ormoc, crisis-induced learning was most visible through the construction of two impressive levees financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Mechanisms to contain the Anilao and Malbasag Rivers in the event of another fifty-year flood had been touted as highly successful in withstanding the flood impacts of stronger Typhoon Koni (locally codenamed Gilas) that struck Ormoc on 17 July 2003.<sup>77</sup> Typhoon Koni had brought higher rainfall levels than Typhoon Thelma in 1991. Yet,

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again. However, Aparis suddenly succumbed to liver cancer on 30 September 2013 at the age of 64. Available newspaper accounts do not mention Aparis during the relief and rehabilitation process.

<sup>76</sup> Boin, McConnell and t’Hart, “Governing After Crisis,” 9.

<sup>77</sup> I. Antonio, “Community commitment for sustained efficiency of infrastructures: Ormoc City, Philippines.” Paper presented at the International Conference on Disaster and Management Systems (ICISDM2005), Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 3-5 August 2005.

infrastructures such as dams and levees are only effective insofar as they do not fail at the moment of flood impact. This is the major weakness of any infrastructural response to flooding, which can be undermined when the same ecological issues prior to a disaster prevail, such as the persistence of illegal logging, squatting along major waterways, inefficient water collection and management, etc. To what extent were these cultural-ecological issues managed properly in post-1991 Ormoc? More importantly, how has infrastructural solutions, in this case the construction of the JICA dam, influenced new forms of governance in Ormoc, if these indeed occurred? How did learning occur in post-1991 Ormoc, beyond the more obvious mechanism adopted by the local government through infrastructure construction? At the social-cultural level, which determines how communities, families and individuals reflect and remember a massive crisis such as the 1991 Ormoc tragedy, what learning did occur, especially in the absence of any sustained collective initiative to create social memory?

### **Disaster as social catharsis?**

Questions on social memory and learning are relevant because the process of remembering a disaster and sharing memories is not only a cathartic experience for survivors.<sup>78</sup> It is, more importantly, a process of creating a shared identity and past, reflected in songs, myths, plays, art, etc. The social narratives that emerge from disaster remembrance, organized and coordinated formally by museums, memorials, archives and anniversary events,<sup>79</sup> provide a valuable venue for understanding why and how a society persists despite a massive crisis. The evolution of the social construction of a disaster is crucial not only to determine the facts of a crisis as it was experienced, but more importantly to analyse societal lessons for more effective programs for mitigation and adaptation.

The contradictions in the 1991 Ormoc tragedy case are puzzling. The scale of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy could have provided space for political,

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<sup>78</sup> "Disasters and social memory," *Natural Hazards Observer* Vol. 40 No. 1 (Boulder, Colorado: Natural Hazards Center, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder, September 2015) (Online).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

cultural and socio-economic catharsis and transformation, but there appears to have been no substantial change at all. In which areas of society can any perceived change be observed? Poverty in Ormoc City today remains widespread, with an incidence of 28.3 per cent in 2009.<sup>80</sup> Total population was estimated at 191,200 in 2013,<sup>81</sup> with 31.04 per cent living in urban areas and the majority 68.96 per cent in rural areas.<sup>82</sup> The dominant land use pattern remains agriculture, which in 2004 comprised 56.64 per cent of the total land area compared to only 32.38 per cent of forest.<sup>83</sup> For many *manunubo* or sugarcane laborers in the haciendas of Ormoc City, the daily minimum wage has been stuck in the range of 70 to 140 pesos, when the mandated daily minimum wage in the sugar industry range from 220.50 pesos to 262 pesos for the Eastern Visayas region in 2013, while piecemeal (or *pakyaw*) workers were also entitled to new wage increases.<sup>84</sup> Local politics show the same leading families with undiminished influence economically and politically as before 1991. In a learning resource material titled “*Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*” compiled by the Department of Education (DepEd)-Region VIII that aims to “create a local history, a collection of data from the context of its parts in the regional and the division level,” it notes that the local government has established and developed 18.4 hectares accommodating 3,233 housing units in ten resettlement areas.<sup>85</sup> Originally meant for victim-survivors of the 1991 flash flood, these areas today commonly comprise only 60 per cent victim-survivor families and 40 per cent recent migrants, with the latter having no shared memory of the flood. Such a situation leads one to ask where the other forty per cent of victim-survivors have gone. For young people born after 1991, the tragedy

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<sup>80</sup> National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), *Table 1. Ranking of Cities/Municipalities by Poverty Incidence, Region VIII: 2009*, Tacloban City: Regional Statistical Coordination Unit VIII, Eastern Visayas Region, 2009 (Online).

<sup>81</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), *Municipality/City: Ormoc City*. Diliman, Quezon City: Philippine Standard Geographic Code (PSGC) (Online).

<sup>82</sup> Department of Education Region VIII-Eastern Visayas, *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, Unpublished learning resource material (Undated), 76.

<sup>83</sup> Ormoc City Public Library, *Ormoc City Profile*, Unpublished article (2004), 2.

<sup>84</sup> Department of Labor and Employment, *Wage Order No. RB. VIII-17, Prescribing A New Wage Structure And An Additional Cost of Living Allowance for Eastern Visayas*. Tacloban City: National Wages and Productivity Commission, Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board VIII, 4 September 2012 (Online).

<sup>85</sup> Department of Education (DepEd)-Region VIII, *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, 83.



that unfolded in 1991 is simply a story, a myth, something unreal. It does not help that there are wide estimates of the number who died and went missing in November 1991 depending on who is making the estimates. From a high of 8,000 deaths,<sup>86</sup> the lowest estimate is about 3,900,<sup>87</sup> with a range of figures to be found in between. Indeed, this has contributed to the mythical ominous aura of the flood, something that grandparents regale their grandchildren about during unusually rainy days.

Confronted with these paradoxes and doubly aware that the 1991 Ormoc tragedy is just one in a multiplicity of disasters that have struck the Philippines, I go back to my first question at the very beginning of this chapter: What can a twenty-two-year old flood event teach about the nature of social change and transformation in a calamitous situation? The question is highly relevant in a country deemed to be one of the most disaster-prone in the world. This was highlighted recently, after the humanitarian crisis triggered by Supertyphoon Haiyan (locally codenamed Yolanda) on 8 November 2013 that also devastated Ormoc City for a second tragic time after just over two decades. As an attempt to document for the first time the Ormoc disaster that unfolded after a typhoon and flash floods in November 1991, this research argues that it is crucial and apt to undertake an evaluation and assessment of that disaster, with the endview of understanding why it happened at all and how to move forward as a society that has learned from its mistakes. While disasters have been numerous in the country prior to and after 1991, the Ormoc disaster remains a turning point in the history of the Philippines for reasons beyond the fact that the loss of lives and properties had been enormous. For the first time, it arguably brought to the fore the discourse on two issues that had not been emphasized as expected consequences of massive disasters: accountability and learning as twin aspects in recovery, and vulnerability, and the link between the two. Accountability—that process of assessing the performance of political leaders—and learning—improving existing structures and

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<sup>86</sup> See, for example, R. Middleton, "Causes of the Ormoc flash flood disaster in Leyte, Philippines." Paper presented at the Conference on Environment and Development in Southeast Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 9-10 July 1994.

<sup>87</sup> Reliefweb, *Philippines Floods Nov 1991 UNDRO Situation Reports 1-8*. UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, 7 November 1991 (Online).

arrangements—had not been undertaken at a sustained and systematic manner that would have resulted in political changes in governance. Further, the 1991 Ormoc flood proved that vulnerability and poverty—often delineated in disaster discourse but in reality intrinsically inseparable—are never homogeneous conditions for many communities and families. Indeed, the most vulnerable and poorest communities and families in society suffer the most persistent risks to lives and livelihoods. These risks remain even after the intervention of government agencies and non-government organizations that implement well-intentioned programs of relocation and community rebuilding in resettlement areas. As the case studies in the last three chapters of this research will show, in many instances vulnerability and poverty are not resolved for many families.

## Chapter organization

Ormoc is undoubtedly a microcosm of twentieth century Philippine politics and society. At the most basic level, the question of social change and transformation in post-disaster Ormoc City will need to be explored. If there is one thing that defines Ormoc, it is that its history and fate are inextricably linked to that of a few elite families that have shaped and continue to influence its landscape, culture, economy and politics. That Filipino elite families have been able to successfully transition from economic to political realms is far from surprising; it has been the subject of avid scholarly attention in the past. Sidel (1993), for example, argues that the availability of elected positions has allowed many *hacenderos* throughout the archipelago to claim proprietary entitlement by passing on to their scions positions as mayors, congressmen and provincial governors.<sup>88</sup> He goes further: “Economic might and political power have often proved to be mutually reinforcing, spinning an upward spiral of dynastic success.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> J. Sidel, “Walking in the shadow of the big man: Justiniano Montano and failed dynasty building in Cavite, 1935-1975,” in *The Anarchy of Families, State and Family in the Philippines*, ed. A. McCoy (Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies in cooperation with Ateneo De Manila University Press, 1993), 112. Also T. Rivera, *Landlords and Capitalists: Class, Family and State in Philippine Manufacturing* (Quezon City: Center for Integrative Development Studies, University of the Philippines, 1994). Rivera, in particular defines local manufacturing elite as landed capitalists, non-landed capitalists and Chinese-Filipino capitalists.

<sup>89</sup> J. Sidel, “Walking in the shadow of the big man,” 112.

McCoy (1993) calls these political families “working coalition[s] drawn from a larger group related by blood, marriage and ritual.”<sup>90</sup> The potency of political families, adds Fegan (1993), is that they are “a more efficient political unit than an individual because it has a permanent identity as a named unit, making its reputation, loyalties, and alliances transferable from members who die or retire to its new standard bearer.”<sup>91</sup> This is especially true in compact provincial towns and cities where electoral votes are seen as fiefdoms. At its core, says McCoy, “[t]he theory of rent seeking best explains the economic relations between the Filipino elite and the Philippine state.”<sup>92</sup> Defined as a political process that advantages elite families with monopolies of wealth and resources, rent-seeking is characterized by the use of effort, time and other productive resources to shift favor from authorities toward a rent-seeker’s cause, translated into economic activities such as licenses. McCoy cites the economist James Buchanan, who defined rents as the artificial advantage enjoyed by an entrepreneur that the state favors, when the latter restricts “freedom of entry” into the market. The result for the economy is negative because “[n]o value is created in the process; indeed the monopolization involves a net destruction of value. The rents secured reflect a diversion of value from consumers generally to the favoured rent-seeker with a net loss of value in the process.”<sup>93</sup> Certainly, this appears to be the case in Ormoc City, where elite families have monopolized land ownership including those that are by law ineligible for private ownership like forestlands, and have successfully used this economic monopoly to put them into positions of power at the local, provincial, regional and even national levels.

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<sup>90</sup> A. McCoy, “An Anarchy of Families”: The historiography of State and Family in the Philippines,” in *The Anarchy of Families, State and Family in the Philippines*, ed. A. McCoy (University of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies in cooperation with Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1993), 10.

<sup>91</sup> B. Fegan, “Entrepreneurs in votes and violence: Three generations of a peasant political family,” in *The Anarchy of Families, State and Family in the Philippines*, ed. A. McCoy (University of Wisconsin Center for Southeast Asian Studies in cooperation with Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1993), 50-51.

<sup>92</sup> A. McCoy, “An Anarchy of Families”: The historiography of State and Family in the Philippines,” 10.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Yet such political and economic developments did not come about overnight. **Chapter 2** traces the history of Ormoc at the turn of the century, by looking at how the dominant elite families, notably the Aboitizes, Larrazabals, Seraficas, Tans, Torreses and, later, Codillas linked their fortunes with that of the city. Excluding the Codillas, all five families are considered *hacendero* families. With the exception of the Aboitizes, all have successfully transitioned into politics. All of them have been able to accumulate vast landholdings and converted large tracts of forests in the process of cultivating cash crops for export, first in *abaca* and later in sugar. While the Aboitiz family has not pursued political ambitions and eventually withdrew from Ormoc to focus on consolidating its wealth from Cebu, the Larrazabals have become powerful political actors starting in the post-World War II era. To what extent did the configurations of power elite relationships change over the course of a century as a direct consequence of two major disruptions or turning points in Ormoc's history, namely, its devastation towards the end of the Second World War in 1945 and again in 1991 due to a typhoon and flood?

Writing about the epistemology of disaster from the standpoint of social order, Stallings (1998) offers an interesting conception of disaster as an "exception" to routine.<sup>94</sup> He defines routines as the actions and interactions that are repeated regularly, and in the process provide the structure for people's lives. Taken in the aggregate, routines constitute the structure of social systems. An exception occurs when an event triggers a "breakdown, interruption, or disruption of a routine."<sup>95</sup> Following this conception of calamity, two major 'exceptions' occurred in Ormoc's social cultural trajectory, namely, World War II that saw the destruction of the city due to widespread bombings by Japanese and American forces, and the tragedy brought about by the 1991 flash flood.

The focus of **Chapter 2** is on the impact of the cash crop economy on the environment. State-building during the decolonization period was only

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<sup>94</sup> R. Stallings, "Disaster and the theory of social order," in *What is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*, ed. E.L. Quarantelli (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 137.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

just picking up speed and the elite families in Ormoc were just starting to consolidate their fortunes in landholding, a process that had begun for the Aboitizes in the late nineteenth century, but for others in the 1920s. It is indicative that in 1934, the Tans, who would later field a son to the Senate and another to the Congress were only among many sugar planters and owners identified in the Sugar Plantation Audit undertaken by the American colonial government to allocate sugar quotas.<sup>96</sup> By the 1940s, they would become more powerful as it would be through the efforts of Congressman Dominador Tan that Ormoc was inaugurated as a city in 1947.<sup>97</sup> To be sure, why a small provincial town in the backwaters of Leyte could even capture the attention of President Manuel Roxas in order to inaugurate it suggests the rising political ascendancy of the Tans during this time. The Larrazabals, on the other hand, were not mentioned in the Sugar Allocation list at all.

Nagano-Kano (1981) defines the years 1946-1962 as a “period of reconstruction” in the Philippine sugar industry vis-à-vis the changing US sugar policy, and 1962-1974 as a “period of expansion of sugar production” through the *haciendas*.<sup>98</sup> The sugar crisis started in the late 1970s and dragged on into the 1980s. The collapse of the sugar industry in 1985 resulted in 250,000 sugar workers across the country becoming unemployed or underemployed, which triggered the rise of insurgency in areas like Negros Occidental, where sugarcane production was concentrated.<sup>99</sup> In 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos was deposed through a popular uprising. President Corazon Aquino in the following years until she stepped down in 1992 was hounded by military coups. Given the above political and socio-economic situation, **Chapter 3** discusses deforestation in Ormoc City, a process that began in the 1900s, but with commercial logging starting only in

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<sup>96</sup> *Executive Orders Relative to Sugar Allocation* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, Government of the Philippine Islands 1936).

<sup>97</sup> Republic Act 179, “An Act Creating Ormoc City,” was subsequently repealed by Republic Act 6388, “Election Code of 1971.”

<sup>98</sup> Y. Nagano-Kano, “The structure of the Philippine Sugar Industry at the end of the American colonial period and after 1974,” in *Commodity Studies No. 3, Research and Working Papers* (Quezon City: Third World Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, University of the Philippines, 1981), 27-28.

<sup>99</sup> M. Satake, *Sugar Industry Workers and Insurgency: The Case of Victoria-Manapla* (Bacolod City: Southeast Asia Centre for Resource Studies, Consultancy and Training (SEACREST) 2001), 3.

the 1930s. The systematic clearing of forestlands in Ormoc, as in other parts of the country, was reflective of the wave of development policies pursued by the Philippine government in expanding homestead agriculture, logging for export, and later on, land redistribution. Similar to the involvement of elite families in the cultivation of abaca and sugarcane discussed in **Chapter 2**, the same families became intricately linked to the logging industry in Ormoc. While large areas of forestlands have not characterized Ormoc, forest reserves in the highlands of the city had been systematically reduced since the beginning of the twentieth century in the cultivation of sugarcane.

The preceding two chapters provide a backdrop for a discussion in **Chapter 4** of the typhoon and its impacts in Ormoc. The policies prioritizing economic development through systematic deforestation, logging (both legal and illegal), and the cultivation of commercial crops like abaca and sugar have predisposed Ormoc City, already susceptible to floods due to its unique geography and topography, to a massive disaster. **Chapter 4**, therefore, begins with the argument that what occurred in 1991 in Ormoc was not and could not be argued as a 'natural' phenomenon.

**Chapter 5** documents the immediate effects of the flood and asks how and in what ways it had disrupted individual, familial and community lives and routines in Ormoc. It will be seen as paving the way for an examination of cases in three subsequent chapters that deal with three longer term recovery and resettlement areas with their own particular sets of concerns related to the history of Ormoc's development. Particular attention in these subsequent chapters will be given to new configurations and perceptions of community, as victim-survivors were resettled in relocation areas that did not always take into account the need to preserve pre-existing communities in one area.

Evaluating change in post-disaster areas is complex. Theoretically, the economic and social disruption that a disaster brings provides valuable space for policy changes that could potentially benefit those who had been affected by it, in particular the most vulnerable communities. The homeless are provided homes in theoretically safer areas, while the unemployed are

given jobs. At the economic level, the pump priming of the economy using aid funds allow for the creation of new jobs, the circulation of much needed money, and the opportunity for the victim-survivors to start new lives. However, practice shows that this is seldom the case. In Haiti after the 12 January 2010 earthquake, for example, “three new crises” characterized the economic and political landscape, namely that “nearly a million people still homeless; political riots fuelled by frustration over the stalled reconstruction; and the worst cholera epidemic in recent history, likely caused by the very UN soldiers sent to Haiti to protect its people.”<sup>100</sup> The failure of reconstruction in Haiti was blamed on the abject failure of foreign aid donors to fulfil their aid pledges, to fully include the Haitian people in their own reconstruction, and ultimately to practice honesty and transparency within their own ranks.<sup>101</sup> In Rio de Janeiro after the flood disaster of 1988, politics—in the form of federal squabbles over the budget and political party competitions—took primacy over disaster mitigation. “The disaster,” says Allen, “had come, and gone, and little, it seemed, had been improved.”<sup>102</sup> Again in the case of the Johnstown flood of 1889 in the United States, not one of the wealthy owners of the mountain resort, where the failed dam was located, were ever found culpable for the trauma of death and destruction that a massive flood brought to Johnstown.<sup>103</sup> Bearing these examples in mind, the analysis of the flood in Ormoc City in 1991 is looked at from two different levels. At the first instance, the nature and reliability of statistics—poverty incidence, unemployment, underemployment, agrarian reform, crime, etc.—provide a picture of Ormoc City prior to, during and after the 1991 flood, with the end-view of analysing the creation of vulnerability that pre-dates the crisis. Vulnerability is, thus, a process that does not occur overnight, but over many years with a multiplicity of factors that determine how and why groups of people are placed in situations that render them vulnerable to natural hazards. In Ormoc City,

<sup>100</sup> J. Katz, *The Big Truck that Went By, How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 2.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> E. Allen, “Political responses to flood disaster: The example of Rio de Janeiro,” in *Disasters, Development and Environment*, ed. A. Varley (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto and Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), 102.

<sup>103</sup> D. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood* (New York, London, Toronto and Sydney: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1968).

factors such as landlessness, lack of viable employment opportunities outside the sugarcane plantations, and even the topography that is naturally susceptible to flooding, all these contribute to the creation and persistence of systemic vulnerability. Such an approach is cognizant of the fact that, while vulnerability is also about individual choices (e.g., where to build a house, what materials to use, when to relocate, etc.), these choices are undeniably shaped by the policies that are already in place (e.g., private ownership of land, employment patterns, minimum wage by law vis-à-vis real wages, etc.). At the second instance, vulnerability as experienced by families and communities on a daily basis is analysed through ethnography. The focus, however, is on the most vulnerable families, identified as such by government agencies and non-government organizations, those who had become recipients of various types of assistance in the aftermath of the 1991 flood. This second level of analysis aims to understand the nature of vulnerability, especially after an infusion of material and financial help.

**Chapter 6** examines the case of Barangay Tambulilid, the largest resettlement area in Ormoc City, with ten *puroks* or districts from a total of thirteen considered as relocation or resettlement sites. It is a first class barangay with a total population of 9,477 in 2012.<sup>104</sup> Another barangay, Lao, was established by the city government for those affected by the construction of the JICA levees along the Anilao and Malbasag rivers. While three other barangays had been designated by the Ormoc City government as resettlement areas for the 1991 Ormoc flood victim-survivors—namely, Alta Vista, Curva and Bagong-Buhay—there were other such areas established by non-government organizations. These include San Lorenzo Village originally managed by the Archdiocese of Palo in Barangay Luna, the Saint Philippine Duchesne Ormoc Workers Foundation, Inc. (SPDOWFI) established by the order of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ) also in Barangay Luna, the Saint Benedictine Village provided by the Order of Benedictine Sisters (OSB) in Barangay Ipil, and two communities established by the international NGO, World Vision, in Barangays Ipil and

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<sup>104</sup> Barangay Captain Ronaldo Roca, interview with the author, 28 May 2013 in the Barangay Tambulilid Hall, Ormoc City, original in Filipino. The interview occurred in the barangay city hall.



Liniao. The centrality of community building during the post-recovery stage has been the subject of many empirical researches in the past, and there is a wealth of insights about the need to preserve pre-existing communities in new sites in order to maximize coping and resiliency by strengthening social capital among survivors themselves.<sup>105</sup> Tambulilid for a time after the 1991 flood had a reputation for petty criminality. Residents attribute this to the fact that Tambulilid became a melting pot of individuals and families whose only claim to a shared experience was having been illegal settlers along the Anilao or Malbasag rivers, and of their houses having been totally washed away by the flood. To what extent then was a 'community' actually established here when there existed a common negative perception of this resettlement area as crime-ridden, crowded, and unsafe? This chapter will attempt to uncover these issues with a focus on social vulnerability, revolving around land ownership.

**Chapter 7** looks at the case of Barangay Nalunopan,<sup>106</sup> a rural agricultural barangay just five kilometres from the city center. Its total population in 2011 was 861.<sup>107</sup> Meanwhile, **Chapter 8** is a case study of Barangay Luna Purok II-B, a community established and headed until today by the order of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ). Barangay Nalunopan and Luna II-B, the latter officially named the Saint Philippine Duchesne Ormoc Workers Foundation, Inc. (SPDOWFI), share strong links, with many residents in SPDOWFI originally sugar laborers in Barangay Nalunopan. Several families in Luna II-B also have relatives still residing in Barangay Nalunopan. Until today, however, no sustained intervention to improve the lives of residents has been pursued in Nalunopan. The RSCJ sisters had initially offered Purok Uno families, where the majority of the deaths in Nalunopan in November 1991 occurred, lots at Barangay Luna II-B in order to give them a new life outside the sugarcane plantation. Some of these residents readily transferred in 1998, but later returned to Nalunopan

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<sup>105</sup> See, for example, K. Erikson, *Everything in its Path, Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976); M. Underhill, "Katrina's displacement: The untold consequences of disaster resettlement in Colorado" (Master of Arts thesis, Department of Anthropology, Colorado State University, 2008); and, D. Aldrich, *Building Resilience, Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery* (University of Chicago, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>107</sup> Liga ng mga Barangay, *Barangay Management Information System*. Ormoc City, 2013.

due to lack of livelihood in Luna II-B. Government authority in Nalunopan is weak; it is privately-owned land after all by one of the richest families in Ormoc with interests in such diverse areas as hotels, resorts, pineapple plantations, and recently a proposed exclusive residential subdivision that will transform a large tract of Nalunopan land. This chapter will explore the question of land tenure and poverty within the plantation system of sugarcane production and the persistence of vulnerability among one of the most vulnerable communities in Ormoc City—the sugarcane laborers.

Roth (1974), in his historical study of friar estates in the Philippines argues that “[t]he commercial orientation of the landowning class, the type of market outlets for agricultural produce, and the local ecology influence the nature of the agricultural regime employed on a particular hacienda.”<sup>108</sup> Geertz’s conception of “agricultural involution” on nineteenth and early twentieth century Java under Dutch rule is particularly relevant, especially when considered within the context of the dynamic process of contestation, transition and negotiation between culture and society when largely influenced by a highly specialized ecology, in his case, of complementary cultivation of paddy and sugar in Indonesia.<sup>109</sup> In Barangay Nalunopan and in other Larrazabal plantations, a peculiar term strikingly captures the context of a predominantly feudal relationship. The landowner is referred to as *agonal* or *agawn*, which is a term that means “lord” or “big boss”. Yet when I asked if this term was used to refer to other *hacenderos*, the answer was “no”. It was a name that had been appropriated in the beginning by the “big man” Iñaki Larrazabal in the 1970s, who was the prototypical *hacendero* sporting a rakish hat, brash manner and a big voice.<sup>110</sup>

The SPDOWFI in Ormoc, a foundation headed by the RSCJ congregation, but in reality managed by a lone nun, Sister Iraida Sua-an, who has immersed herself in the community since its establishment in 1998, was originally meant to provide a safe haven to Barangay Nalunopan

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<sup>108</sup> D. Roth, “The friar estates of the Philippines” (PhD diss., Department of Anthropology and the Graduate School, University of Oregon, 1974), 10.

<sup>109</sup> C. Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1963).

<sup>110</sup> Nonetheless, the term is now used to refer to Sabin Larrazabal and other Larrazabal landowners, as some of the respondents show.

plantation workers who had been expelled for suspicion of fomenting dissent over wage increases in the aftermath of the 1991 flood. However, newer residents were accepted from urban poor communities when a number of residents moved back to Nalunopan in search of new livelihood opportunities. In many respects, the community in Luna II-B is a closed one, as the RSCJ maintains complete legal and religious authority over it and in the process is seen as the new *agawn*. To what extent residents of this community are able to negotiate rights with the RSCJ, especially in relation to land tenure is something that remains to be seen, as the process of land titling will only commence after June 2014. Although the RSCJ is organizationally under the authority of the Archdiocese of Palo, Leyte, it has largely managed the community without the interference and involvement of the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, as Catholic values are actively promoted in this community, the role of the Catholic Church in post-disaster community building is also explored in this chapter.

The concluding chapter attempts to link all three cases in order to see the bigger picture of post-disaster Ormoc, with focus on the issue of accountability, vulnerability and the long and tedious process of moving forward from disaster. Using personal narratives and primary sources—documents and photographs—to explore notions of vulnerability, accountability, coping and community building, it hopes to provide insights about the social construction of disaster and post-disaster recovery.

### **Getting into the field**

I must note here that I had never been to Leyte, much less to Ormoc, prior to my ethnography, which began in February 2013 and ended in October 2013. Before this, I had spent five months doing library research at various libraries in the Philippines as well as online, in particular undertaking a newspaper review about Ormoc in general and the 1991 flood in particular. Newspapers reviewed were primarily with national circulation, namely, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Philippine Star*, *Malaya*, *Manila Times*, *Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Times Journal*, and *Philippine Free Press*. While there had been a provincial newspaper called *The Reporter* that had local

circulation in Ormoc City and other Leyte municipalities, no copies could be found at the National Library, city public or university libraries in Tacloban, Ormoc or Baybay in Leyte. *The Reporter* went bankrupt in 2003, by which time copies were also lost due to neglect and the vagaries of nature in the case of the archives of the Visayas State University library in Baybay, Leyte. It is a shame that no copy of *The Reporter* survives today, undoubtedly a real loss for local history research, such as this study.

A three-sided methodological approach was adopted comprising of documentary research, interviews and ethnography. Documentary research was undertaken in various libraries in Manila, Cebu and Leyte. In Manila, research was undertaken at the National Library, Manila Observatory archives, University of the Philippines library, Ateneo de Manila University Rizal Library, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Administration (PAGASA), DENR, and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). In Cebu, visits to the University of San Carlos library yielded some results. It was more challenging in Ormoc as a cursory inquiry at the City Public Library was met with blank stares. However, a visit to the Eastern Visayas State University library resulted in a fruitful conversation with its librarian, Ann Pardales, who graciously provided a copy of the learning resource material "*Mithi og Bahandi*", which was compiled under the auspices of the Department of Education (DepEd), but which did not have a copy itself. It was also with the help of the Benedictine sisters and staff of Saint Peter's College that a copy of JA Fotorama's November 1991 video recording of the flood and its impacts was obtained, which JA Fotorama was reluctant to re-copy for me, as well as several pictures that the nuns took to document the devastation wrought by the flood in their school and convent grounds. After another flooding brought about by Supertyphoon Haiyan in 2013, from which the cities of Ormoc and Tacloban were heavily affected, it is possible that the copies of documents, maps and photos I had obtained during my research remain the sole surviving copies today.

Interviews using semi-structured questions had been undertaken face-to-face or electronically. A list had been generated from the newspaper

review that became the basis for identifying who among the government officials, priests, representatives of NGOs, and journalists could be approached to verify facts as well as elicit personal memories about the event. Some of those who had been contacted declined to speak to me, noting that it was such a long time ago and that they had already forgotten it. Some who did consent to be interviewed did not provide new information that the newspaper articles had not already mentioned at that time. In Tacloban, research at the regional offices of the DENR, Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), National Statistics Office (NSO), and National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB)<sup>111</sup> all generated important data. The DENR-Region VIII, in particular, kept a box of reports about its investigations in the aftermath of the November 1991 flood, which included photos, a list of cadastre lots, and maps. It was an unexpected but welcome find since records keeping in Philippine government offices is rudimentary at best, with government documents commonly discarded after five years. In fact, it was only the DENR-Region VIII among other agencies and offices that kept these reports, un-digitized but remarkably well preserved. In Ormoc, meanwhile, the Ormoc City Hall, in particular the offices of the City Planning and Development (CPDO), Environment (CE), and the Social Welfare and Development (CSWD), the *Liga ng mga Barangay*, and the district office of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) provided maps and data upon request. It is indicative that an inquiry with the Philippine Armed Forces, both in Manila and Ormoc City, proved futile; I was told that no records at all existed of the Armed Forces' involvement in the 1991 disaster response. No officers who had been assigned in Ormoc at that time were also available to talk to me as it was routine for them to be regularly transferred to other localities and so there was no one who had stayed long enough in Ormoc who could supply any information. Interviews with police officers, an academic, Muslims, representatives of religious organizations, members of

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<sup>111</sup> The National Statistics Office and the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) were merged with the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics and the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics on 12 September 2013 by virtue of the Philippine Statistical Act of 2013 or Republic Act No. 10625. With this law, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) was created. However, during the fieldwork in Leyte, the offices the author visited were still named the NSO and the NSCB, and are identified here as such. Official statistical data gathered online, on the other hand, had been updated to reflect PSA data source.

the Chinese community, and Ormoc local officials and municipal staff met with a higher rate of success. Requests for interview with Mr. Sabin Larrazabal and Mr. Eufrocino Codilla Sr. were declined, while another request for interview with Mrs. Victoria Locsin did not materialize.

The ethnography, as expected, yielded the richest and most meaningful collection of stories from survivors who, in many instances, had recounted their experiences for the first time since 1991. Indeed, because the questions in the interview requested specific details, there were some individuals who expressed strong emotions, which prompted me to ask if the interview should be terminated. However, no one asked to stop the interview. These structured interviews using a prepared form were all audio-recorded with the permission of every respondent and usually took from thirty minutes to an hour and a half. It must be said that the search for respondents was not at all difficult because any Ormocanon who had experienced the flood usually needed no prodding to share their stories. There were instances when I only had to ask tricycle drivers with whom I had a ride if they had been around that November in 1991 for them to launch into a long tale. In the beginning, an interpreter was used, a young man by the name of Victor Arcuiño strongly recommended by Sister Iraida Sua-an of the RSCJ where I stayed for the duration of my fieldwork. He acted more as a bodyguard than an interpreter to a female researcher who appeared unnecessarily impetuous to some in positions of authority and so needed a “protector” to deter any untoward incidences. His services were later discarded when I felt confident enough in the Visayan language and the presence of locals to venture out on my own. It must be noted here that it was crucial that I linked up with development organizations already actively working in the communities, notably the RSCJ in Barangays Luna II-B and Nalunopan, and Gawad Kalinga in Tambulilid. The assistance of these organizations was instrumental in gaining trust among possible respondents who would otherwise not been as open had I been alone. It must be noted that in many agricultural areas in the Philippines, townsfolk often consider strangers suspiciously especially if they introduce themselves as undertaking “research.” The suspicion is due mainly from the fact that “researchers” are

perceived as communists, who are out in the rural areas to recruit for the New People's Army (NPA) and to incite unrest. As such, it was imperative that I had prior introduction from local organizations that had already been working in the area for several years. In other areas, I had coordinated closely with and asked prior permission from barangay captains, who were usually very helpful, with one providing a "protector" as I did my rounds in the locality. This "guide" stayed outside and spent time talking to the male members of the family, who were reticent to talk to me, while I conducted the interviews with the female members of the family. Again, based on observations during numerous site visits to various rural areas of Ormoc City, men were hesitant to talk to a single woman who is introduced as an intellectual. Women were more open for conversations, however informal. But to enter into discussions with men, I needed to be introduced by someone who was known in the community. Indeed, Lummis, in his book *Listening to History* (1987), aptly notes that "[g]ender cannot be a neutral social factor" in social science research and that

[t]here are conventions which affect the relationships between men and women, particularly between strangers where role expectations are the strongest.<sup>112</sup>

A word must also be said about the strengths and weaknesses of oral history, especially as a methodology used in the determination of past events. In the case of the 1991 Ormoc flood, there is a twenty-two year difference from the event itself and the articulation of personal experience in 2013 when the ethnography was undertaken. While a disaster the likes of the 1991 Ormoc flood was undoubtedly something that cannot be easily forgotten by those who had personally experienced it and time, as Lummis (1987) argues, "is the most obvious required provenance for any historical

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<sup>112</sup> T. Lummis, *Listening to History, The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books: 1987), 52. The gender dichotomy is further complicated by the interposition of the historian, first as interviewer and transcriber, and later as analyst, who bring with him/her his/her own ideas, values and predispositions that create and deepen the distortions inherent in the materials he/she handles. See also R. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound, The Art of Oral History*, Second Ed. (New York; Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1991), especially A.K. Harris, "Introduction," 1-9.

information,”<sup>113</sup> memory *is* fallible and frail. It is notable, for instance, that two “official” biographers of the American President Abraham Lincoln noted strongly that “after such a very short experience...no confidence whatever could be placed in the memories of even the most intelligent and honourable men” and that reminiscences as such were “worthless to history.”<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, oral history has a valuable place in historical research, as it is a source of oral tradition or, more aptly, national tradition.<sup>115</sup> In many ways, the stories of the 1991 Ormoc floods, though these had not been previously collected and documented, remain in the general consciousness of Ormoc society and form part of Ormoc history. Oral history, as such, far from being without value to historical research, in fact “provides a source quite similar in character to published autobiography, but much wider in scope,”<sup>116</sup> thereby “allow[ing] evidence from a new direction.”<sup>117</sup> Indeed, the primary contribution of oral history is that it allows for the recreation of a multiplicity of standpoints, not just from printed documents. In particular, its inclusion of the experiences of the “under-classes, unprivileged, and the defeated,”<sup>118</sup> often the sectors of society that are marginalized and rendered silent by mainstream sources of dominant history, permits all voices to be heard. Oral history, thus, refocuses and successfully penetrates the questions that emerge on how memories are processed and changed. These questions, as experienced in this particular research, are the heart of oral history: “What happens to experience on the way to becoming memory? What happens to experience on the way to becoming history? As an era of intense collective

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>114</sup> The first statement is attributed to John Hay and the second to John Nicolay, Abraham Lincoln’s clerks when he was still in the White House as president. Cited in K. Erekson, “Alternative Paths to the Past: The ‘Lincoln Inquiry’ and the Practice of History in America, 1880-1939” (PhD diss., Department of History, Indiana University). UMI Microform 3315924 (Ann Arbor: ProQuest LLC, 2008), 189.

<sup>115</sup> Jules Michelet, in his *History of the French Revolution* (1847-53), defined this as that “...which remained generally scattered in the mouths of the people, which everybody said and repeated, peasants, townsfolk, old men, women and even children; which you can hear when you enter of an evening into a village tavern; which you may gather if, finding on the road a passer-by at rest, you begin to converse with him about the rain, the season, then the high price of victuals, then the times of the Emperor, then the times of the Revolution.” Cited in P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past, Oral History*, Third Ed. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>116</sup> P. Thompson, “The voice of the past: Oral history,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. R. Perks and A. Thomson (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 28.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.



experience recedes into the past, what is the relationship of memory to historical generalization?”<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, the research is cognizant of the fact that the twenty-two year gap from the unfolding of the disaster in 1991 and its retelling in 2013 has implications on the realities of “selective amnesia and artificial distance”<sup>120</sup> that Frisch argues can result in, “far from coincidentally, ...a present that seems to float in time—unencumbered, unconstrained, and uninstructed by any active sense of how it came to be.”<sup>121</sup> The challenge had been to situate these stories squarely in the timeframe supported by the documentary evidences supplied by both government and other generally accepted sources of information. Both oral history and documentary sources, therefore, are equally significant and not necessarily contradictory or inferior to the other. Finally, it is hoped that the attempt to document some of the stories of the 1991 Ormoc flood from the perspective of the most vulnerable and poorest communities and families, as Frisch convincingly argues, will create a “shared authority” in the interpretation of that disaster. As a consequence, history will be able to “provide the basis for shared reimagination[s] of how the past connects to the present, and the possibilities this vantage suggests for the future.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Ethnographic sites**

Several field sites were visited with the purpose of undertaking interviews, namely, Barangays Luna II-B, Tambulilid (which included the

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<sup>119</sup> M. Frisch, *A Shared Authority, Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (State University of New York Press, 1990), 10.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Frisch here provides two interesting stories to illustrate both selective amnesia and artificial distance, as these referred to the Vietnam War. In particular, he articulates beautifully the fundamental dilemma of how the Vietnam War is being remembered and understood as history: “If so much that is threatening about this recent history can be blocked out now, with the evidence all around us and experience still painfully fresh, can we expect people to relate to challenging but fragile visions of a more complex past, resurrected and presented by imaginative public history projects? Will they not be ignored, absorbed, deflected, or denatured even more easily, and at precisely the point where they threaten to make a real difference in contemporary life? If public history is to avoid this fate, we need to understand more clearly the processes of denial and disengagement, processes which the current ‘digestion’ of the Vietnam War show to be well-advanced politically, culturally, and intellectually” (17-18).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., xxiii. The shared authority refers to the relationship between the historian and the interviewed person, and scholarship and public history. See also A. Shuman, “Oral history,” in *Oral Tradition* Vol. 18 No. 1 (Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, March 2003), 130-131 (Online).

DSWD Core Shelter where majority of residents were Muslims, the two communities under Gawad Kalinga, Block 7 and GK Rotary), Nalunopan, Ipil (which included the illegal settlement along Panilahan river, the Benedictine Village and the World Vision community), Isla Verde (both former and current residents), and Ormoc City proper. In total, there are fifty-nine (59) interviews involving seventy-seven (77) individuals, which means that there were several cases with two respondents interviewed at the same time, who may not be related by marriage or blood, but who happened to be together at the time and agreed to be interviewed simultaneously. There were both advantages and disadvantages to this approach. On the positive side, the two respondents were able to jog each other's memories and in the process provided richer detail because, more often than not, they had already known each other prior to the flood. On the negative side, one usually dominated the conversation and it took considerable skills to manage these interviews properly. Indeed, the majority of the interviews were done in public spaces often in front of *sari-sari* stores or on the respondent's porch or receiving area where privacy was virtually non-existent. Several of the neighbors, usually women, frequently and enthusiastically interjected during the interview, and there was often much laughter and joking when this happened. Exceptions to this were those interviews undertaken at the GK Rotary Provincial Office in Tambulilid, where respondents were first identified by a point person from GK and ushered into the room where my interpreter and I waited. This approach was later abandoned when I realized how limiting it was when I could not see how the respondents acted in their own homes.

In subsequent chapters, reference to respondents is made using only their first names in order to protect their identities. In some cases their full names had been completely changed, unless specified otherwise. Efforts were made to ensure gender balance, but with limited success as the men were usually at work during weekdays, leaving their wives and children behind at home. There were in total twenty-four males out of seventy-seven (77) individual respondents. While the majority of the respondents identified themselves as Roman Catholics (many only nominally), three were Muslims,

while I had no success interviewing members of other denominations, including those from the Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC). A legal officer of the INC, however, did provide written answers to questions I was asked to submit. Visits to other places were also undertaken, such as Lake Danao where the geothermal plants were located, Barangay Domonar where I found a religious cult, Barangay Milagro where numerous religious organizations had an established presence, Green Valley where the city currently disposes its solid waste, Barangay Simangan where the Ondo Codilla farm and barracks were located, Barangay Nueva Vista where the rolling hills of the pineapple *haciendas* of the Larrazabals provided overwhelming panoramic views, the sprawling urban poor village in Simangan that was home to numerous large families, and Sudlun, a small community of desperately poor families at the edge of the derelict Tan *hacienda* in Barangay Luna. These sites could not emphasize more the yawning gap between rich and poor in Ormoc. Several visits were also made to the fascinating Anilao and Malbasag rivers, those two rivers that went on a rampage that day in November 1991, visits that were made during ordinary ‘normal’ days when the rivers were calm, and during unusually rainy days when the waters became uncommonly turbid and frighteningly turbulent.

### **A small note on translations**

Majority of the interviews undertaken in Ormoc had been in Bisaya (or Cebuano), which is the local language. Translations to English were undertaken as carefully as possible, to reflect the particular nuances of chosen words and sentence structures. In the beginning, the transcription of the interviews was made with the assistance of Mr. Victor Arcuiño, who had been my official translator and interpreter around Ormoc City in the first few weeks of the fieldwork. In many interviews in Barangay Nalunopan, two women residents from Barangay Luna II-B, Ate Nita and Nang Perlita, who were given the task of accompanying me by Sister Iraida Sua-an, provided unofficial translation. These latter interviews occurred in very informal settings, with neighbors often freely interjecting in the discussions. The unique circumstances of all the interviews are detailed in the Bibliography as much as possible to provide as much context to the interview process. When

a particular Bisaya word or phrase proved difficult to translate, Sister Ayds, as she is popularly known, was a veritable source of clarification and enlightenment. However, despite all the help from so many kind people, all errors and mistakes in this research are mine.

M.T.M. Alders  
January 2017

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## ABACA, SUGAR AND THE NEW ELITE

*[Tacloban's] population is poor and miserable, like that of all the rest of the province, which is sparsely populated. If it were better cultivated, it could yield all the products of its neighbour; it has several notable rivers; in its very wooded mountains, volcano craters are found...The forests nourish the same animals as the rest of the archipelago...The mountains contain numberless quantities of land shells shining with the brightest colors. There are very abundant quarries of sulphur, mines of iron, lodestone and asbestos in quantity.*

- J. Mallat, *The Philippines, History, Geography, Customs, Agriculture, Industry and Commerce of the Spanish Colonies in Oceania* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1864), 189

Two lasting colonial legacies are central to understanding the ecological changes that shaped Ormoc a century prior to 1991. The rest of Leyte, with Tacloban as the island's center, was economically underdeveloped in the nineteenth century, but it was teeming with natural resources waiting to be exploited. First of these legacies was the increasing integration of its local economy to global trade through the export of abaca, followed by sugar. The entrenchment of an indigenous *principalia*, already established as a homegrown municipal elite in many organized municipalities in the Philippines starting from the late sixteenth century,<sup>123</sup> further spurred local economic growth. The second legacy was the legalization of landholding,<sup>124</sup> which reached its peak in the post-World War II period and

<sup>123</sup> N. Owen, "The principalia in Philippine history: Kabikolan, 1790-1898," *Philippine Studies* Vol. 22 No. 3-4 (Ateneo de Manila University, 1974), 297-324.

<sup>124</sup> May argues that the wide acceptance of the notion of land tenure in colonial Philippines, particularly among historians, as having been introduced by the Spanish regime, is a myth. See G.A. May, "The making of a myth: John Leddy Phelan and the "Hispanization" of land tenure in the Philippines," *Philippine Studies* Vol. No. 3 (Ateneo de Manila University, 2004), 275-307. Subsequent comments, however, both refute and support to varying degrees May's assertion. Veneracion, for instance, argue that, "May's claim that there is no such thing as "European (much more, Spanish) concept of land ownership" at the time of their colonial rule in the Philippines, therefore, sits on fragile ground" because "he had relied almost entirely on written materials" (312-313). On the other hand, Schumacher notes that "May [is] too modest in his final assertions, since I am convinced that he has clearly established as far as that can be done, several major key points." These points are (1) the existence of both individual private and communal barangay land property, at least in Luzon; (2) the majority of historians have taken to Phelan's conclusions on land tenure on *The*

paved the way for the establishment of large *haciendas*. While little had been accomplished in terms of land titling during the Spanish colonial period,<sup>125</sup> there was increased emphasis in sugar production at the turn of the twentieth century. The development of large-scale sugar cultivation accelerated the trend toward the legalization of the ownership of public lands. In particular, the introduction of the Torrens title system<sup>126</sup> in 1902 and homesteading<sup>127</sup> in 1903 under the American colonial administration was instrumental in this process, as were policies in the post-World War II era aimed at converting public lands into alienable and disposable properties.

This chapter traces the social, political and economic transition and transformation of Ormoc, highlighting the primacy of abaca and sugar production in the late nineteenth century and its impact on Ormoc's ecology and society. It delves into the historical role played by local elites, those social and economic entrepreneurs of the Spanish era, in shaping the origins of what would become Ormoc in 1991 and thereafter. The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of limitless opportunities on a "new frontier" that resulted in newfound wealth being held by a small group of risk-taking individuals, who were primarily Spaniards and later included *mestizos*. The history of Ormoc is, thus, undeniably, the history of pioneering elite families. These twin colonial legacies have led to a cultural-ecological condition in Ormoc aptly described as an agricultural involution<sup>128</sup>, which resulted in a society characterized by persistent poverty, social inequality, and

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*Hispanization of the Philippines* (1959), which was not focused on land tenure at all; (3) there are a multiplicity of land tenure systems in sixteenth-century Europe and Spain itself, rather than just one; and, (4) the dominant assumption of Phelan's time is a "linear development of tribal societies from primitive communal ownership to a system based on private ownership" (316). See F. Zialcita, J. Veneracion, and J. Schumacher, S.J., "Comments on Glenn May's article," *Philippine Studies* Vol. 52 No. 3 (Ateneo de Manila University, 2004), 308-319.

<sup>125</sup> For a succinct background on the land settlement systems in the Philippines, see C. Paderanga Jr., "A review of land settlement systems in the Philippines, 1900-1975," *Philippine Review of Economics and Business* Vol. 24 No. 1 & 2 (Quezon City: College of Economics, University of the Philippines, March & June 1987), 1-54.

<sup>126</sup> The Torrens title system is a system of land registration where ownership of land is rendered indefeasible through registration of a certificate or title of ownership. See M. Raff, "Toward an ecologically sustainable property concept," in *Modern Studies in Property Law* Vol. III, ed. E. Cooke (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Hart Publishing, 2005), 77-90.

<sup>127</sup> See L. Iyer and N. Maurer, "The cost of property rights: Establishing institutions on the Philippine frontier under American rule, 1898-1918," Working Paper 09-023 (Harvard Business School, 2009) (Online).

<sup>128</sup> See C. Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*.

accelerating environmental degradation, setting the stage for the massive devastation of November 1991.

### **From informal settlement to *pueblo* (town)**

The name Ormoc is thought to derive from *Ogmok* or *Ugmok*.<sup>129</sup> These terms refer both to lowland or depressed plain and the spring located between the present barangays of Donghol and Mahayag.<sup>130</sup> It is not impossible to suppose that a variation of the name may already have existed among indigenous settlers,<sup>131</sup> prior to the coming of the Spaniards in the early part of the sixteenth century, to refer to that fertile place between the two rivers, present-day Anilao and Malbasag. This area, because of its unique topography, provided fresh water for drinking, bathing and fishing, a safe anchorage for small boats, and arable land for planting crops. Trade with other communities may already have flourished in Ormoc during the pre-Spanish period.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Pastells, in 1571, mention an Omok in the island of Leite as one of the villages assigned as encomienda to twelve individuals, namely, Juan Martin, Juan Vexarano, Lazaro Bruzo, Alonso de Henao, Francisco de Sepulveda, Pedro Sedeño, Juan de Trujillo, Juan Fernandez de Leon, Lorenzo de Villafañá, Gaspar de los Reyes, Martin de Aguirre, and Francisco de Quiros (*The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, Vol. 34, edited by E. Blair and J. Robertson, 308). However, Leyte appears to have been identified as several locales in the Visayas. In 1588, Bishop Salazar of Manila wrote to the Spanish King describing “Leyte”, which is “thirty leagues south of Cubu,” as “one of the most excellent islands of this bishopric” (“Relation of the Philipina Islands”, in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*). By 1591, several variations of “Leyte” had been identified and assigned as different encomiendas, namely “Leite” to Don Pedro de Oseguera; “Leyte” to Pedro Sedeño; and another “Leyte,” which was lumped together with Masbate and Ybabao to Francisco Moral (“Account of the encomiendas in the Philipinas Islands” in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, Vol 8—1591-1593, 96-131). In 1604, Chirino refers to an Ogmuc and Ogmuk, as one of three additional missions opened in Leite (Chirino, *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas*, 1604). All in *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898, Explorations by Early Navigators, Descriptions of the Islands and their Peoples, their History and Records of the Catholic Missions, as related in contemporaneous Books and Manuscripts, showing the Political, Economic, Commercial and Religious Conditions of those Islands from their earliest relations with European Nations to the close of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. and annot. E.H. Blair and J.A. Robertson.

<sup>130</sup> Ormoc City Local Government, “Ormoc City Tourism Brochure.” Ormoc City, 2013.

<sup>131</sup> Tantuico believes that these first settlers were “primitive Malaysians” who “had some well-developed trade and commerce with the Chinese, Javanese and Indonesians who frequented the island with their junks, vintas and sailboats.” F. Tantuico, *Leyte Towns, Histories/Legends* (Tacloban City, 1980), 82.

<sup>132</sup> Justimbaste refers to an unpublished manuscript by a Father Vicente Braganza entitled “Story of Leyte” at the Divine World University Museum in Tacloban, which notes that ancient gold ornaments and ceramic pieces had been excavated in Leyte. Professor Otley Beyer allegedly identified these ornaments and ceramic as being similar to “Japanese [sic; Javanese] gold work of the pre-Majapahit period” “resembl[ing] certain ancient jewelry of the pre-Spanish inhabitants of the Batanes Islands and Central Luzon.” E. Justimbaste, “A brief

Jesuit Father Diego Garcia, who arrived in the Philippines in 1599 to undertake a visitation of the Philippine vice-province, wrote to the Reverend Claudio Acquaviva about the plight of the missionaries to illustrate the difficulties posed by Ormoc's geography and weather:

The climate of this land is excessively hot and oppressive...Travel is mostly by water, with the usual attendant perils. Where one can go by land it must be on foot, because up to now there are no mounts to be had in the Visayan islands. And even if there were, the roads are so steep in places that there is no going on horseback; one must clamber. Where the ground is level the mire is so deep, especially during the rainy season, which is the greater part of the year, that horses would simply get stuck without being able to move. In fact, our missionaries must do their travelling not only on foot but barefoot.<sup>133</sup>

Between 1596 and 1597, Jesuit missionaries led by Father Ramon Prat found the settlements to be small and composed of a few families that revolved around whoever was powerful enough to command authority. During this time, early settlers did not reside in the *poblacion*, where churches had been built, but preferred to live in the countryside near forests where their families hunted and their tilled fields and orchards. By January 1600, three towns were established in Ormoc, three churches built, and 646 people baptized out of a total population of 4,000.<sup>134</sup> However, because Ormoc was situated close to the bay, its residents were continually exposed

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history of Ormoc" in *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, Department of Education (DepEd)-Region VIII (Undated), 13.

<sup>133</sup> H. De La Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581-1768* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 182. E. Justimbaste, however, believes it was the Augustinians rather than the Jesuits, who were first to set foot in Ugmok when Miguel Lopez de Legaspi gave it as part of an encomienda to one of his soldiers, Francisco de Quiros, in 1577. It was probable, according to Justimbaste, that the five Augustinians who accompanied the mission and led by Father Andres de Urdaneta also came to Ugmok. E. Justimbaste, "Brief history of the Catholic Church in Ormoc," Sts. Peter and Paul Parish. Ormoc City, Leyte, June 2009 (Online).

<sup>134</sup> De La Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines 1581-1768*, 187. By 1600, the Jesuit missions in the Philippines totalled 40, namely, in Antipolo, Tinagon, Ormoc, Palo, Dulag, Carigara, Alangalang, Bohol, Tanay and Mandaue. There were a total of 43 churches constructed with 12,696 baptized Christians out of a total population of 54,330. In addition, according to De La Costa, there were an estimated 25,000 or 30,000 "within the confines of the Jesuit missionary district" to whom evangelization had not yet been preached. Nonetheless, there were only fifteen priests and an unnamed number of lay brothers who were responsible for the entire evangelization project.



to the threat posed by Muslim slave raiders. Between 1626 and 1627, for example, Raja Bungsu, successor to Raja Batara Shah Tangah of the Tausug in the Sulu archipelago, pillaged the Jesuit mission in Ormoc and carried off 300 captives.<sup>135</sup> Another attack on Ormoc occurred in 1634, when Cachil Corralat,<sup>136</sup> a Maguindanao lord, burned the church along with fifty warriors and beheaded the resident missionary, Father Juan del Carpio. Very early on, it was clear the rivers and bay of Ormoc were both a boon and bane to its early residents. The experience of the Kabikolan provides an indication of the impact of Moro raids to pre-colonial Philippine communities, where fortifications were built and coastal defence measures were initiated to protect towns.<sup>137</sup> Early Ormoc, however, did not appear to have promoted any concerted resistance to Moro raiding despite its apparent devastating effects on demography, settlement patterns, trade, and capital accumulation. In Bicol and in many parts of the Visayas, the Moro raids had partially explained why economic growth and commerce had been slow despite the introduction of the Bourbon Reforms<sup>138</sup> in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The tapering off of the Moro attacks in certain parts of the Visayas in

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 322-323.

<sup>136</sup> Known among the Spaniards, according to De La Costa, as Cachil Corralat or, according to Tantuico, as Katsil Kulanat, or as Dapitwan Kudrat. *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898, Explorations by Early Navigators, Descriptions of the Islands and their Peoples, their History and Records of the Catholic Missions, as related in contemporaneous Books and Manuscripts, showing the Political, Economic, Commercial and Religious Conditions of those Islands from their earliest relations with European Nations to the close of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol 22 – 1625-1629, edited and annotated by E.H. Blair and J.A. Robertson, 117. Slavery in pre- and post-1565 Philippines has a sizeable literature. See, for instance, A. Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* Sixth Ed. (St. Lucia: University of Queensland, 1983); and, W.H. Scott, *Slavery in the Spanish Philippines* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1991).

<sup>137</sup> See N. Owen, *Prosperity without Progress, Manila Hemp and Material Life in the Colonial Philippines* (University of California Berkeley, Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1984), 28-30.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 34. Some of these reforms, occurring between 1750 and 1799, include the gradual opening up of the local economy to international trade through the establishment of the Economic Society of Friends of the Country and the Royal Philippine Company, both of which aimed at trade promotion and production of export goods; creation of the tobacco monopoly; institutionalization of new bureaucratic structures and fiscal controls, thereby resulting in the gradual reform of abuses; expulsion of the Chinese, which allowed the Chinese mestizo community to emerge; expulsion of the Jesuits, which among others led to the growth of the Filipino secular clergy; and the introduction of various policies and programs designed to increase production of cash crops such as sugar, cotton and indigo.

the mid-nineteenth century meant that, theoretically, economic growth could be pursued unimpeded.<sup>139</sup>

With the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Philippines in 1768 after 187 years, the Augustinians took over the missions in Leyte, with Father Francisco Martinez leading the Ormoc mission, while the Franciscans were placed in northern and western Samar.<sup>140</sup> Of the Jesuit administration of *cabeceras*, the Franciscan fathers had this to say, which indicates at least during the eighteenth century, that those areas where there were Jesuit missions may have retained their dispersed character and did not dramatically change since the advent of Spanish rule including in Ormoc:

The Jesuits did only one thing well and efficiently. This was commerce and for greater profits. *They allowed the indios to live in the hills and along the coasts* so that they could gather wax, medicinal plants and others which they bought and sold dearly in Manila [emphasis supplied].<sup>141</sup>

### Changing social and economic landscape of Ormoc

Like other early Philippine settlements in areas such as Pampanga in 1571,<sup>142</sup> private ownership of agricultural lands in Leyte and, in particular, Ormoc did not exist. In addition, while there was a stratified society composed of chiefs or *datus*, freemen or *timagua*, and slaves, a code of customary law did prevail to preserve social order, a system that drew its rationale from the communal notion of shared benefits. Chirino writing about Ugmok in 1604, for example, noted a man from the chiefly class who initially

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<sup>139</sup> See J. Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898*, Second Ed. (National University of Singapore, NUS Press, 2007).

<sup>140</sup> H. De la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, 592. However, Imperial notes that it was the Franciscans who took over administration of Jesuit missions in Leyte. Justimbaste, on the other hand, writes it was the Augustinians who succeeded the Jesuits in Leyte. R. Imperial, *Leyte (1898-1902), The Philippine-American War* (Office of Research Coordination, University of the Philippines, 1996), 18; and, E. Justimbaste, "Brief history of the Catholic Church in Ormoc," (Online).

<sup>141</sup> R. Imperial, *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> See J. Larkin, *The Pampangans, Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1972); and, J. Larkin, "The causes of an involuted society: A theoretical approach to rural Southeast Asian history," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 30 No. 4 (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies August, 1971), 783-795.

had difficulty reconciling with the notion of baptism on account of having three wives, all of them of high rank, and the difficulty posed by giving up dowries if he divorced any of his wives.<sup>143</sup> The chiefs were also denounced for imposing fines on the common people, which sometimes became so oppressive that the debtor became a slave along with his wife, children and relatives.<sup>144</sup> Thus, the existing social structure in pre-colonial Leyte, including Ormoc, was composed of the following three classes: the chiefs or *datus*, the freemen, and the slaves. Of the last, there were sub-categories: “those who are slaves of long standing or from their birth; those by captivity; those for crimes; and those for loans.”<sup>145</sup> However, life was not extraordinarily onerous, as people were generally “sure of being welcomed, sheltered, and offered food” when they travelled anywhere in the island of [Leite], and that “whether their harvests be good or bad, [the residents] never raise or lower the price of rice among themselves, which they always set to one another at a fixed price.”<sup>146</sup> By 1768, Ormoc boasted four rural schools.<sup>147</sup> By 1866, the Augustinians had succeeded in constructing a total of forty more schools in Leyte, with a total student population of 8,263, both males and females.<sup>148</sup> By 1893, an additional 49 schools were built across the province. Aside from schools, the Augustinians also built roads and revolutionized agriculture through the use of work animals and the plow.<sup>149</sup>

In terms of population, Ormoc in 1846 had a total of 4,975 taxpayers paying 995 tributes, while the total population of Leyte in the same year was 87,175.<sup>150</sup> Also, Ormoc was slowly becoming a *pueblo* with a growing

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<sup>143</sup> The story had a happy ending, when he divorced his wives and married his favorite, who had also asked to be baptized. See P. Chirino, *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas. The Philippines in 1600*, Historical Conservation Society (Series) 15 (Manila: National Historical Society, 1969), 290-292.

<sup>144</sup> See “Letter from Martin de Rada to Viceroy Martin Enriquez,” in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898* 34 (1519-1522; 1280-1405), edited and annotated by E. Blair and J. Robertson, 292-293.

<sup>145</sup> Martin de Rada refers specifically to “Visayans or Pintados, who are more quarrelsome than the Lussones or Moros.”

<sup>146</sup> P. Chirino, *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas*, 280-282.

<sup>147</sup> M. Artigas y Cuerva, *The Colonial Odyssey of Leyte (1521-1914): A Translation of Reseña de la Provincia de Leyte*, ed. R. Borrinaga and C. Kobak (Philippines: New Day Publishers, 2006), 93-94.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>149</sup> E. Justimbaste, “A brief history of Ormoc,” 28.

<sup>150</sup> J. Mallat, *The Philippines, History, Geography, Customs, Agriculture, Industry and Commerce of the Spanish Colonies in Oceania*, 189.

number of permanent residents. In 1839, the first year that a *gobernadorcillo*, *principales* and *cabezas* were ever mentioned in an official record, town residents led by the *gobernadorcillo* Juan Simon, eight members of the *principalia*, twenty-two *cabezas de barangay*, five *tenientes nombrados* (incumbent barangay heads), and two *testigos* (witnesses), petitioned the office of the *alcalde mayor* (governor) in Tacloban, Victoriano Lopez Llanoses, for Ormoc to be recognized as a parish.<sup>151</sup> Until then, it had retained the status of a *visita* attached to the parish of Palompon, a situation that persisted from 1778 to 1850. The petition argued that the number of *tributos* (tax payers) in Ormoc totalling 1,907, undoubtedly larger when compared to Palompon with only 626 *tributos*, should justify the establishment of an independent parish.<sup>152</sup> In addition, there was the distance to Palompon, the unpredictable weather that affected regular visits by assigned priests, and the disagreeable attitudes of Fathers Don Mateo Samson and his coadjutor Don Florentino Antonio that prompted Ormoc residents to clamor for their own parish. It is clear here that these early Ormoc residents headed by the *principalia* were learning how to assert themselves collectively, particularly about matters that appeared most important to their way of life. It was on 13 November 1850, eleven years after the petition, when the Governor Captain General of the Philippines, the highest colonial official in Manila, finally signed the declaration.<sup>153</sup> Father Luciano Babiano, then parish priest of Palompon, became the first parish priest of Ormoc, while the parish itself was formally installed on 21 December 1850.<sup>154</sup>

Numerous industries in Leyte flourished in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. In particular, coconut oil production (which was often disrupted by hurricanes), tobacco and abaca cultivation, fishing, gathering of wax and honey from surrounding forests, and textile production similar to

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<sup>151</sup> E. Justimbaste, "A brief history of Ormoc," 29.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. Mojares, however, writes that Ormoc became a town and parish in 1834 when it separated from the town of Palompon. R. Mojares, *Aboitiz: Family & Firm in the Philippines* (Cebu City: Aboitiz & Co., 1998), 21.

Samar were among the primary industries in the Leyte province.<sup>155</sup> In the succeeding two and a half centuries of Spanish rule, the story of Ormoc would be inextricably linked with elite families, starting with the Aboitizes, whose fortunes began in that small backwater of Leyte. These pioneering families responded to the demands of the global capitalist system and the promise of wealth for those who had control of assets and labor to join the bandwagon of emerging monocrop industries.

### **The saga of abaca wealth**

For more than fifty years before the twentieth century, the production of abaca was the most important industry of the Philippine islands. Its huge demand was due to twin developments in the United States, the Philippines' main abaca export market. There was the rise in maritime trade, which entailed increased demand for maritime cordage, and the deepening of the industrial revolution, which resulted in greater demand for binder twine, transmission rope, Manila drilling cables and lariats for machines.<sup>156</sup> Abaca exports in 1903 were more than two million piculs, valued at \$21,701,575, and representing 66 per cent of the total exports of the Philippines.<sup>157</sup> While exports of abaca began in 1818, it wasn't until about 1840 that it became substantial, as shown below:<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> J. Mallat, *The Philippines, History, Geography, Customs, Agriculture, Industry and Commerce of the Spanish Colonies in Oceania*, 189. Miguel de Loarca in his "Relation of the Filipinas Islands" referred to the island of Baybay or Leyte as a "large and well-provisioned island, although the people dress in medriñaque. Medriñaque, he said, "resembles calico, and is made from a kind of wild banana," most certainly abaca. De Loarca, "Relation of the Filipinas Islands," in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898* 34 (1519-1522; 1280-1405), edited and annotated by E. Blair and J. Robertson, 49 & 50.

<sup>156</sup> N. Owen, *Prosperity without Progress*, 48.

<sup>157</sup> H.T. Edwards, "Abaca (Manila Hemp)," in *Farmers' Bulletin No. 12* (Manila: Bureau of Agriculture, 1904), 1.

<sup>158</sup> N. Owen, *Prosperity without Progress*, 5. Owen notes the confusion over the first shipment of abaca to the United States. The year 1818 is commonly given, while some sources claim that the first shipment was made by Lt. White. However, White arrived in Manila only in the summer of 1819 so that it would appear improbable that he would be credited for jumpstarting the first shipment to the United States.

**Table 2.1**

**Exports of abaca from the Philippines**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Tons</b>
1818	41
1825	276
1840	8,502
1850	8,561
1860	30,388
1870	31,426
1880	50,482
1890	67,864
1900	89,438

Source: H.T. Edwards, "Abaca (Manila Hemp)", 534.

The Philippine islands enjoyed a virtual monopoly in abaca production, as other countries like India, Andaman Islands, Borneo, Florida, and the West Indies failed to replicate its success in the nineteenth century. This comparative advantage was fully exploited by entrepreneurs who expanded its cultivation and production with great success in several regions, namely, Camarines, Albay, Sorsogon, Masbate, Mindoro, Marinduque, Samar, Leyte, Panay, Negros, and Mindanao.<sup>159</sup> Some of the best fibers from Leyte were produced in southern towns around Malitbog Bay. Indeed, because a distinctive alluvial type of soil composed of heavy silt loam characterized Leyte, the quality of the abaca produced here was nearly, if not quite, the equal of Albay, which was then the leading abaca-producing province in the islands.<sup>160</sup> In terms of value, abaca's price quotations reached a minimum of \$6.75 in 1885 to a maximum of \$17 in 1888 per picul.<sup>161</sup>

Leyte abaca was further graded according to quality, which indicates an incentive for entrepreneurs to become involved in the enterprise considering the high promise of returns, as shown in the table of quotations below:

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<sup>159</sup> H.T. Edwards, "Abaca (Manila Hemp)," 535.

<sup>160</sup> The excellent soil conditions of Leyte are briefly discussed in C. Dorsey, "Soil conditions in the Philippines," 7<sup>th</sup> *Annual Report of the Philippine Commission 1906* (Manila: Bureau of Printing 1906), 369.

<sup>161</sup> H.T. Edwards, "Abaca (Manila Hemp)," 543.

**Table 2.2**

**Manila quotations of Leyte abaca, as of 17 March 1904**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Quotes (in \$)</b>
Good current	27.00
X current	26.00
Superior	23.50
Second 1	21.75
Second 2	18.5
Second 3	16.75

*Source:* H.T. Edwards, "Abaca (Manila Hemp)," 543.

By 1901, abaca (or hemp) would be the primary export commodity of the Philippines:

**Table 2.3**

**Relative value of abaca vis-à-vis other Philippine Export Products,  
Fiscal Year 1901**

<b>Product item</b>	<b>Amount (in \$)</b>	<b>Per cent of total exports</b>
Manila hemp	14,453,110	62.30
Copra and cocoanuts	2,663,340	11.47
Sugar	2,293,075	9.88
Tobacco, cigars and cigarettes	2,217,728	9.56
Coffee	6,616	0.02

*Source:* H.T. Edwards, "Abaca (Manila Hemp), 543.

Abaca prospered in any type of soil, but was most successfully cultivated in slopes, which provided natural protection against strong winds. It did not compete with rice farming since abaca did not thrive in paddies. As such, rice continued to be cultivated in the lowlands, an arrangement that proved beneficial to planters who could profit from the development of two income streams, and to laborers and the local population who were guaranteed continued food security. Abaca cultivation proved highly popular because it did not entail much production cost in machinery, fertilizer, knowledge, or trained labor. It could be harvested at any time and had no particular "seasons". Edwards, an American fiber expert who wrote a

manuscript on abaca production in 1904 for the Philippine Bureau of Agriculture, argued that the “most difficult problem which the tropical planter has to face, and that which more than any other one thing will determine his ultimate success or failure, is the manner in which he controls and directs his labor.”<sup>162</sup> Labor needed to be available at all times, and would require “a thorough knowledge of the native character and an infinite amount of tact and patience.”<sup>163</sup>

Ormoc imported its labor including entire families from Cebu and Bohol, which numbered 6,000 during the months of May and June.<sup>164</sup> For laborers, the heavy manual demand of abaca harvesting also meant that they could work only an estimated sixteen days per month to produce one *arroba* (25 pounds) per team of two or three laborers.<sup>165</sup> The common practice in the industry was a combination of a wage and share basis, wherein laborers were contracted to clear the forest and plant a hundred *abaca* seedlings at a fixed rate per *pisoson* (or 3.4 hectares).<sup>166</sup>

A layer of middlemen linked the producers of *abaca* found all over the archipelago to the merchant houses in Manila that acted both as exporters of Philippine products and importers of textiles and other commodities. Both ends of the production and marketing spheres were, however, fraught with uncertainty, as the producers were not always certain of the availability of international ships at the port of Manila, and merchant houses were not always sure of the availability of supply from the provinces. In the middle of this commodity circuit were the middlemen, predominantly Spaniards in the beginning and later included Chinese, who were in the enviable position of intermediating and brokering the industry between the provinces and Manila, and later, Cebu and Iloilo, through the control of interisland trade. These middlemen, best exemplified by the Yrastorza and Aboitiz families and prominent Spanish entrepreneurs in the Visayas, usually owned the boats

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 537.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> P. Borseth, “Report of the Governor, Province of Leyte,” in Appendix H, Annual reports of provincial governors, *Sixth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission to the Secretary of War (Without Exhibits)* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1905), 311.

<sup>165</sup> N. Owen, *Prosperity without Progress*, 76-77.

<sup>166</sup> H.T. Edwards, “Abaca (Manila Hemp),” 537.



that shipped the abaca to Manila. In Ormoc, early elite expatriate families first established themselves as abaca middlemen and later transitioned into landowning, correctly assessing that real wealth and power on an agricultural frontier could lie only in the ownership of vast tracts of land.

### **The makings of the Aboitiz fortunes**

Few know that the Aboitiz family and corporation, which have extensive interests in many spheres of the Philippine economy today, started in the small town of Ormoc. The beginnings of the family fortune can be traced to a young Basque mariner, Paulino Martin Aboitiz y Mendazona, who was born in 1851 to a farmer near Lequeitio, Vizcaya in northern Spain. He arrived in the Philippines in the 1870s and found work piloting a sailboat for a Leyte shipowner named Gregorio Yrastorza.

Gregorio himself (ca. 1820-1890) was born at sea en route to the Philippines where his Basque parents were going to live as immigrants. He grew up in the small town of Ormoc and married a Spanish *mestiza* named Ana Torres whose own family originated from either Binondo in Manila or the Camiguin island.<sup>167</sup> The Yrastorzas had seven children, whom Gregorio supported through the operation of sailboats and the buying and selling of abaca. Although rumored to possess “vats of fine butter from Australia and china sets number[ing] ‘over a thousand pieces,’”<sup>168</sup> he was not considered the wealthiest individual in Leyte at this time. Archival records, however, mention him as a *don* and *comerciante* in Ormoc as early as 1873.<sup>169</sup>

Paulino Aboitiz later married one of Gregorio’s daughters, Emilia (ca. 1859-1918), around 1880, while a younger daughter, Guadalupe (ca. 1861-1929), married another Basque, Angel Moraza, who would become Aboitiz’s close business associate. Moraza (ca. 1848-1920) had migrated from Ea, Spain, to the Philippines in 1868 as an *alferez cuadrillero* with the Spanish

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<sup>167</sup> Mojares writes that the origin of the Torres family was in Binondo, although they may have lived for some time in Camiguin. However, according to *The Story of Aboitiz & Company*, Ana Torres’ family moved to Ormoc from Camiguin. R. Mojares, *Aboitiz: Family & Firm in the Philippines*. (Cebu City: Aboitiz & Co., 1998), 21; and Aboitiz & Company, *The Story of Aboitiz & Company, Inc. and the Men Behind It* (Cebu City, 1973), 7.

<sup>168</sup> R. Mojares, *Aboitiz: Family & Firm in the Philippines*, 21.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

army.<sup>170</sup> Both the Aboitiz and Moraza families settled in Leyte, each keeping a *tienda* and dealing in abaca, common occupations for Spaniards in the Eastern Visayas at that time. These apparently were excellent livelihoods that allowed many immigrant Spaniards to return to Spain once or twice in their lifetimes or to finance their children's education in that country. Like many who had a monopoly in the economy of a *poblacion* by virtue of running the lone general merchandise store, the two families bought abaca from native farmers and then sold it to agents in the commercial centers in Cebu from whom they received a small commission. The *tienda* in turn sold commodities such as candles, salt, soap, sardines, rice, liquor and textiles imported from Cebu or Manila to local farmers who brought in their abaca to sell in the towns. Thus, by the 1870s, most of the big merchants in Leyte were Spaniards. The most prominent of these included Don Ramon Arlegui in Tacloban, Don Manuel Lopez in Maasin, Don Manuel Caraballo in Tanauan, Don Eusebio Martinez in Cabalian, and Don Francisco Gonzales and Don Gregorio Yrastorza in Ormoc.<sup>171</sup> By 1890, this group expanded to include the Urrutias in Tacloban, Larrazabals and Uriartes in Ormoc, and the Muerteguis in Palompon.<sup>172</sup>

In 1870, Ormoc was the most important coastal town in Leyte. With a population of 11,200 largely devoted to agriculture, commerce and navigation, Ormoc boasted of a growing rural prosperity. Population in Leyte between 1860 and 1900 tripled from 134,493 to 357,641,<sup>173</sup> while Ormoc's population in 1884 likewise rose, albeit more modestly, from 11,967 to 13,315.<sup>174</sup> The surge in abaca demand led to the opening of five main collection areas in the province, namely, Tacloban, Carigara, Malitbog, Ormoc and Palompon. The majority of the abaca produced in the east coast of the province including south Cabalian was sent to Tacloban en route to Manila, while the crop from the west coast including the island of Biliran

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>174</sup> E. Justimbaste, "A brief history of Ormoc," 32. He notes that footnotes 41 and 42 state that the data taken were from *Erecciones de los Pueblos*, Leyte, 1921-1891, Bk. 1, "Estado por pueblos que determina la extension superficial que comprende el distrito judicial actual de Leyte..." and *Gazetter of the Philippine Islands* (Undated), 593.

(which was still under the province of Leyte until 1992) was shipped to Cebu. The annual production of hemp rose in the 1870s to between 70,000 and 80,000 piculs.<sup>175</sup> From 1903 to 1904, a total of 119,352 piculs of hemp were shipped to Tacloban, of which 70,000 piculs came from Carigara, and 211,500 piculs from collecting points on the west coast.<sup>176</sup> By 1905, the surge in demand for abaca resulted in about 22,638 hectares of land in Leyte to be allocated for hemp cultivation, producing over 11 million kilos of abaca.<sup>177</sup>

Ormoc, as the secondary port in Leyte after Tacloban, was linked to the rest of the archipelago through a network of government-commissioned mail boats (*vapores correos*) and cargo-and-passenger vessels operated by the likes of Peele, Hubbel & Co., and Smith, Bell & Co.<sup>178</sup>

Paulino Aboitiz concentrated his business interests in Ormoc, while the Morazas flourished in Baybay, Leyte. Prosperity, however, did not take long for Aboitiz to achieve. In a span of a decade, he was listed as a *don*, *comerciante*, and *juez de paz*, with interests in landowning. He was actively engaged in the acquisition of two parcels of coconut land and a seven-hectare abaca farm in *sitio* Donghol in 1894 in Ormoc; a lot in the Ormoc *poblacion* in 1897; and, in partnership with Don Nicolas Larrazabal, a large tract of land in *sitio* Binataran in the neighboring municipality of Albuera.<sup>179</sup>

Some Chinese *mestizos* also began to be commercially active in Leyte. One of these was a man called Pablo Tan, who got himself baptized as a Christian with Gregorio Yrastorza as sponsor.<sup>180</sup> Tan, however, was not yet a landed man in the late nineteenth century. He was a blacksmith, whose business made *bolos*, plows, and other agricultural implements.<sup>181</sup> He apparently made his fortune selling ironmongery and joined those pioneering entrepreneurs buying agricultural lands in Macabug, a barangay in Ormoc, and eventually setting up his own animal-driven sugar mill.

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<sup>175</sup> R. Mojares, *Aboitiz: Family & Firm in the Philippines*, 23.

<sup>176</sup> E. Justimbaste, "A brief history of Ormoc," 32.

<sup>177</sup> R. Mojares, *Aboitiz: Family & Firm in the Philippines*, 23.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>180</sup> E. Justimbaste, "A brief history of Ormoc," 32.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

## Sugar production and the consolidation of wealth

Developing almost simultaneously with the abaca industry was the far more sophisticated and technologically advanced sugar industry. The Philippine archipelago had exported sugar since the eighteenth century, even achieving the title of being the largest sugar exporter in Asia between 1775 and 1779.<sup>182</sup> But the industry remained small and technologically backward. Its rapid expansion began only in the 1850s, through the intervention of Nicholas Loney, a British vice consul appointed to Iloilo. The economic boom in the Philippine sugar industry was the result of great economic, social and political developments at the national and global levels.<sup>183</sup> The port of Manila was gradually opened to world commerce after 1815 in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. It was also the advent of an era of increased international shipping, as well as the unprecedented growth in demand for sugar in the United States and Great Britain.<sup>184</sup>

In the Philippines, the sugar industry reacted positively by expanding cultivation and export in a way never before observed, in large part supported by foreign capital. The major sugar producing regions in the archipelago were in Negros Oriental, Pampanga, Bulacan, Pangasinan, Tondo and Iloilo, where the establishment of large plantations began to occur following the establishment of the Torrens land titling system in 1902. Prior to the introduction of this system, there were only a few owners who had clear titles to their lands. In a bid to force all landowners to obtain Torrens titles, the American colonial government inaugurated in 1913 an extensive cadastral survey of the archipelago, a process that would drag on for two decades before the Second World War.<sup>185</sup> The result of this state-based exercise was the displacement of many indigenous tribes from their traditional lands in many parts of the archipelago and the consolidation of

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<sup>182</sup> C. Quirino, *History of the Philippine Sugar Industry* (Manila, Philippines: Kalayaan, 1974), 11-12.

<sup>183</sup> See J. Larkin, "The international face of the Philippine sugar industry, 1836-1920," in *Philippine Review of Economics and Business* Vol. 21 Nos. 1&2 (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, March & June 1984), 39-58.

<sup>184</sup> J. Larkin, *Sugar and the Origins of Modern Philippine Society* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), 21-43.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

vast tracts of now public lands under the ownership of a few powerful families.

These developments in the sugar industry, however, did not immediately gain ground in Ormoc. The advent of the Philippine-American War in 1899 saw both the Moraza and Aboitiz families evacuating to Spain in 1901. They returned to Ormoc only later that year. Ormoc, unlike Samar that was plagued by Pulahanism in the 1900s, achieved relative peace and order due to the large contingent of American forces sent to enforce social order in Leyte, with twenty of the 253 soldiers assigned full time in Ormoc. By virtue of law enforcement guaranteed by the American government, four mechanized, animal-driven hemp presses were successfully operated in Leyte, Carigara, Ormoc and Baybay by 1907, ensuring the expansion of the hemp industry.

It was only in 1916 when Ramon Aboitiz, a son of Paulino Aboitiz, introduced commercial sugar production in Ormoc after the purchase of Hacienda Boroc, which was later renamed Hacienda Maria Teresa. This purchase marked the official entry of Ormoc into the sugar industry. The Aboitiz family, while keeping the core of its business in abaca and copra, had already diversified its interests in shipping, ice production, and sugar mill production.

In the rest of the archipelago, sugar centrals began to be constructed in 1910, when American capitalists erected the first modern factory in San Jose, Mindoro, in response to the establishment of free trade between the Philippines and the United States the previous year.<sup>186</sup> By 1909, the United States had passed the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Law that imposed a duty free quota of 300,000 long tons of Philippine sugar into the United States. The limitation was subsequently removed in 1913 through the enactment of the Underwood Tariff Law. In 1912, Hawaiian venture capitalists constructed the first cooperative sugar central in the Philippines in San Carlos, Negros. The cooperative arrangement imposed a milling contract between the central,

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<sup>186</sup> G.G. Gordon, "Sugar centrals in the Philippines," in *Philippine Sugar Yearbook 1950*, ed. J. Mirasol (Escolta, Manila, Philippines: Idefonso T. Runes, 1950), 152.

which provided the sugar mill and installed a railway system for the transportation of the cane, and the planter, who had to set aside a certain portion of his land to sugarcane and to harvest and deliver these to the central's loading station.<sup>187</sup> This arrangement proved highly successful and was copied in other centrals in Luzon, Negros and Ormoc.

In the context of these developments, something must be said about the entrepreneurial character of Don Ramon Aboitiz. Rising from the ranks, first as clerk, bookkeeper, *bodeguero* and jack-of-all-trades, he was business-savvy and quick thinking. His criterion for buying new businesses was simple: "Any business where we can make money, we will go into."<sup>188</sup> With this philosophy in mind, the Aboitizes opened an office in Cebu, kept agencies in Ormoc and Palompon in Leyte, Catarman, Laoang and Catbalogan in Samar, and kept diverse interests in Manila, Cotabato and Madridejos. The sugar mill that the Aboitiz & Co bought in 1916 was located in front of Hacienda Aboitiz in barangay Ipil in Ormoc, and had a rated capacity of only 250 tons daily.<sup>189</sup> In 1929, the mill had an infusion of capital amounting to 300,000 pesos put up by the Aboitizes themselves through the sale of cattle from the family's cattle ranch in Masbate, a venture that had been consolidated in 1922. The incorporators in the mill, aside from Don Ramon, were foreign and Chinese and Spanish *mestizo* investors, namely, the American sugar expert Renton Hind, E.B. Ford, S.H. Deebel, Martin Geary, Tiburcio Tancinco, Bernardo Torres, Jose Sy Hong Chuy, and Arsenio Luz.<sup>190</sup> In the first year, the Ormoc Sugar Central produced 8,000 piculs, doubled this in the second year of operation, made a profit in the third year, and was able to declare dividends the following year.<sup>191</sup> However, Don Ramon and his brothers, keeping faith with the business philosophy of ensuring profit above all else, judged that the sugar central did not guaranty stable, long-term returns. It was sold to Gil Montilla in 1936, who was then Speaker of the National Assembly and a sugarman from Negros with

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Aboitiz & Company, *The Story of Aboitiz and Company*, 19.

<sup>189</sup> C. Quirino, *History of the Philippine Sugar Industry*, 60

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>191</sup> Aboitiz & Company, *The Story of the Aboitiz and Company*, 22.

substantial holdings in the Isabela Sugar Co. in Occidental Negros.<sup>192</sup> Montilla had already eliminated competition in sugar production in Leyte a year before when he bought the only other sugar mill on the island, Rosario Sugar Mill, including its quota of 80,000 piculs of “B” sugar.<sup>193</sup> He installed his nephew, Carlos Rivilla, to whom he also sold the central in 1949 when the latter successfully increased its quota of 66,000 piculs before the war to 180,000 piculs in 1957.<sup>194</sup>

With the advent of sugar centrals, small planters proliferated and production increased. In Ormoc during the pre-World War II period, there were more small planters than in other sugar producing areas in the Philippines. Only forty-five out of 222 planters working with the Ormoc and Rosario mills enjoyed quotas of 1000 piculs or above (133,000 pounds).<sup>195</sup> With small quotas that permitted these planters to deliver only one or two truckloads of cane every week, many of them complained as it forced them to have higher per unit labor costs.<sup>196</sup> The actual percentage sharing in the Ormoc-Rosario sugar mills during the 1936-37 crop year was fifty-five per cent for the planter and forty-five per cent for the miller.<sup>197</sup> The Ormoc-Rosario Sugar Mills had 570 plantations between them, with a total of 599 planters. In the 1935 list of plantation owners and planters affiliated with the Rosario Sugar Mill, the more prominent included Hacienda Rosario, Hijos de Escaño, Inc., Pablo Tan, and Rosalia de Tan as owners, and Hermenegildo Serafica and Antonio Tan as planters. Those affiliated with the Ormoc Sugar Company included, among others as plantation owners, the Government of the United States (Department of War), the Provincial Government of Leyte, Hacienda Casilda, Inc., Hijos de Escaño, Inc., Felipe Larrazabal, Andresa de Cerilles Larrazabal, Ormoc Sugar Co., Codillas (Basilio, Jose, and Lucio),

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<sup>192</sup> Mojares identifies the buyer as Gil Montinola of Negros Occidental, who “paid P1,500,000 for a company with assets of only P360,000.” Quirino, however, notes that it was Gil Montilla who bought out Don Ramon for 750,000 pesos. On a background on Montilla, see I. Runes, “Montilla: Captain of Industry,” in *Philippine Sugar Yearbook*, ed. J. Mirasol (Escolta, Manila, Philippines: Ildefonso T. Runes), Supplement T-X.

<sup>193</sup> C. Quirino, *History of the Philippine Sugar Industry*, 60.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> R. Middleton, “Causes of the Ormoc flash flood disaster in Leyte, Philippines,” 14.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Quoted in Y. Nagano-Kano, “The structure of the Philippine Sugar Industry at the end of the American colonial period and after 1974,” 13.

Fortunata Carillo (identified as the widow of Yrastorza), Tans (Angel, Antonio, Felixberto, Filomeno, heirs of Francisco, Manuel, Mariano, Meliton, Nicolas, Pablo, Pedro and Lucia Carillo, Pilar, Rosalia, and Vicenta), and Nicolas Torres,<sup>198</sup> with the exception of the Torrevillas who were not in the list at all. It is notable that among the names were those identified in 1991 as owning nearly one hundred per cent of the immediate watershed of Ormoc.<sup>199</sup> The dispute between planters and centrals prompted the establishment of the National Sugar Board, which was created on 17 August 1938. In addition, problems at this time were also raised about the appropriate wages and conditions for laborers. However, the onset of World War II stalled any plans for labor reform before they even took shape.

The Japanese military administration occupied Ormoc from May 1942 to October 1944. In the early part of the occupation, the Nagano Detachment forces implemented an Ormoc cultivation plan designed to allow the Ormoc Sugar Refinery Company, set up by Daido Trading Company in Tacloban, to continue large-scale production of refined sugar and alcohol.<sup>200</sup> However, the factory closed, creating unemployment and causing the deterioration of law and order.<sup>201</sup> This closure was blamed on constant guerrilla attacks and the decreased population that could be utilized for labor. Of the elites, some of the Tan and Larrazabal families began collaborating with the guerrillas, while others, including the incumbent mayor Catalino Hermosilla (who traced his lineage to the Yrastorza family and had married a Larrazabal prior to the war)<sup>202</sup> and Dominador Tan according to local folklore, were labelled as Japanese collaborators.

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<sup>198</sup> *Executive Orders Relative to Sugar Allocation Issued by the Governor-General during the Year 1935* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1936).

<sup>199</sup> According to Severino, the families owning most of the land comprising Ormoc's watershed based on real estate records in Ormoc obtained by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) were the Larrazabals, the Seraficas, the Torreses, Torrevillas, Pongos and the Tans. See H. Severino, "Ormoc revisited," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21-22 April 1992.

<sup>200</sup> A. Satoshi, "Food supply problem in Leyte, Philippines, during the Japanese occupation (1942-44)," in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol. 39 No. 1 (Cambridge University Press on behalf of Department of History, National University of Singapore, February 2008), 59-82.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>202</sup> A. Satoshi, "Collaboration and resistance, Catalino Hermosilla and the Japanese occupation of Ormoc, Leyte (1942-1945)," in *Philippine Studies* Vol. 60 No. 1 (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University 2012), 33-68.



The end of World War II saw the rehabilitation of sugar centrals. The newly established Rehabilitation Finance Corporation, with a capitalization of 300,000 pesos, extended loans to restore damaged local industries, businesses, and homes. In total, there were forty-five operational centrals in the archipelago before the war, and by the 1950-51-crop year twenty-eight had been reconstructed and were operational.<sup>203</sup> Total capital investment by centrals was estimated at 178 million pesos, of which forty-two per cent was Filipino, thirty-two per cent American, and twenty-six per cent Spanish, while planters' investments were estimated at 38 million pesos.<sup>204</sup> During that crop year, there were 18,000 registered planters cultivating a total area of 160,000 hectares in the country to sugarcane and supporting thousands of people directly or indirectly dependent on the industry.<sup>205</sup>

In 1952, Republic Act 809 authored by Carlos Hilado, a three-term representative from the second district of Negros Occidental from 1946-1957, opened the rift between millers (or capitalists) and planters (composed of both small planters and *hacenderos*) over sugar crop sharing, the same issue that had been sidelined at the onset of World War II. Republic Act 809 prescribed the crop sharing at sixty per cent for the planters and forty per cent for the millers.<sup>206</sup> Another major difference between central owners and planters is that while the latter *hacenderos* were ninety-one per cent Filipinos, only fifty per cent of the former were non-Filipinos.<sup>207</sup> The disagreement between centrals and planters manifested itself in the 1957 presidential elections, where central owners supported Elpidio Quirino, but it was the planters who brought Ramon Magsaysay to power.<sup>208</sup> Yet who were these planters and how were they able to mobilize themselves to influence national politics? Before centrals, planters had simply milled their cane in their own mills. The creation of centrals naturally led to a specialization of

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<sup>203</sup> R. Pagua, *Facts about Philippine Sugar* (First published August 1948, revised February 1952), 1.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> V. Gonzaga, assisted by M. Decena, *The Socio-politics of Sugar: Wealth, Power Formation and Change in Negros* (Bacolod City, Philippines: Social Research Center-Negrense Studies' Program, University of St. La Salle, 1989), Chapter 8.

<sup>207</sup> Larkin, *Sugar and the Origins of Philippine Modern Society*, 169-170.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

work and obligations and resulted in the formation of planter associations composed of planters specific to a mill district. Each milling district had its own Planter's Association, and eventually these disparate groups were able to organize themselves into a Federation, which, according to Ambassador Oscar Ledesma of the powerful Ledesma clan of Silay, Occidental Negros during an interview in 1986, essentially spoke for all the planters.<sup>209</sup> This Federation became the beginning of the so-called sugar bloc. Meanwhile, Ormoc elite families during the pre- and post-World War II period did not venture into elected national politics, like other politically powerful *hacenderos* in other parts of the country notably Negros, and therefore had not been politically visible on the national stage. Ormoc's contribution to the country's sugar production has historically been small (see below), which indicates a weak influence in national politics, unlike Negros, which produced fifty per cent of the total sugar in pre-World War II Philippines.

**Table 2.4**

**Centrifugal Sugar Mill Production in Ormoc, 1926-1950**

Crop Years	Ormoc Sugar Company (Aboitiz) <sup>a</sup> (In short tons)	Rosario Sugar Mills <sup>b</sup> (In short tons)	Total for Leyte (In short tons)	Total for Visayas (In short tons)	Total for the Philippines (In short tons)
1926-27	-	-	-		
1927-28	-	-	-		
1928-29	-	-	-		
1929-30	1,324	-	1,324		
1930-31	2,757	-	2,757		
1931-32	6,039	-	6,039		
1932-33	13,247	-	13,247		
1933-34	12,266	281 <sup>c</sup>	12,547		
1934-35	4,740	-	4,740		
1935-36	6,948	2,440	9,388		
1936-37	7,570	3,792	11,262		
1937-38	6,653	3,233	9,886		
1938-39	6,210	3,438	9,648		
1939-40	13,590	Merged with Ormoc Sugar Company	13,590		1,413,731 <sup>d</sup>
1940-41	14,439		14,439		
1941-42	713		713		
1945-46	-			-	12,914

<sup>209</sup> Interview by Gonzaga with Ambassador Oscar Ledesma in 1986. V. Gonzaga, *The Socio-politics of Sugar*, 81-82.

1946-47	1,148			42,115	84,576
1947-48	6,240			312,575	398,118
1948-49	9,554			597,197	728,596
1949-50 (Estimated)	12,328 <sup>e</sup>			662,232	797,878 <sup>f</sup>

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Ormoc Sugar Company was first listed in 1930.

<sup>b</sup> Rosario Sugar Mills was first listed in 1934.

<sup>c</sup> Gordon (1950) lists this as 282 with a total of 12,548 in Leyte.

<sup>d</sup> Gordon (1950), 154-156.

<sup>e</sup> Gordon (1950) lists this at 11,155.39

<sup>f</sup> Gordon (1950) lists this at 742,535.69

Source: J. Mirasol (ed), *Philippine Sugar Yearbook 1950* (Escolta, Manila, Philippines: Ildefonso T. Runes, 1950).

## Patterns of agricultural involution in Ormoc prior to 1991

This overview of the agricultural history of Ormoc enables us to investigate what patterns were present in human-environment interactions over several centuries that provide evidence of Ormoc's ecological conditions prior to 1991. I start by asking whether or not the type of agricultural resources that characterise a society results in the institutionalization of particular forms of social relations. This question allows an analysis that highlights the active involvement of people in their environment and on why systems that may appear to be socially unjust continue to persist. In particular, Clifford Geertz's (1963) conception of "agricultural involution" is crucial here. Defined as that "self-defeating process" he had observed in Java, it was a condition where a traditional peasant society, confronted by demands for economies of scale and propelled by rising external trade but unsupported by capital, changes or transforms as a consequence. This ecological change is accomplished through the forced introduction of plantation crops in an increasingly limited area of cultivation and the use of ever more labor through work elaboration.<sup>210</sup> In the end, though hunger and famine are constant possibilities for the majority of the population, no one really dies of poverty in this system, as everyone can be accommodated. But no one also prospers. In a Malthusian context, the dilemma is presented as an image of "a large and fast growing population scrambling ever more desperately for seemingly

<sup>210</sup> C. Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*.

static supplies of food.”<sup>211</sup> Looking at the case of Pampanga in central Luzon in the Philippines, John Larkin (1971) takes the discourse further by proposing several hypotheses in support of agricultural involution, which is relevant in an analysis of the transformation of Ormoc society and ecology prior to 1991. First, complex social and economic arrangements and mechanisms develop when an agricultural society with a large peasant base experiences a shortage in an important resource, be it land, cash or something else. The human response of society is often to spread the benefit of that limited resource to as many people as possible. Second, the more shortages in resources, the more complex social and economic patterns become, resulting in the eventual decline of the economic progress of individual families in favour of collective survival. Finally, varying insufficiencies produce different types of social response, as seen in the experience of Java where a shortage in land led to elaborate social and ritual behaviour while the lack of capital in Pampanga resulted in complicated contractual schemes governing land transferal and harvest splitting.<sup>212</sup> Bringing these hypotheses together, to what extent then can past limitations in agricultural resources and their resulting social relations explain more recent environmental degradation and disaster in Ormoc?

Ormoc, while it had been declared as a chartered city as early as 1947, remained predominantly comprised of a rural population (124,812), accounting for 68.96 per cent of the total population, and only 31.04 per cent defined as urban population (56,177).<sup>213</sup> Its level of urbanization is significantly lower than the national average of 45.3 per cent in 2010, where 41.9 million of the total national population of 92.3 million lived in areas classified as urban while 50.4 million were classified as rural dwellers.<sup>214</sup> Of

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<sup>211</sup> J. Larkin, “The causes of an involuted society: A theoretical approach to rural Southeast Asian history,” 785.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 795.

<sup>213</sup> Department of Education-Region VIII, *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, 76.

<sup>214</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority, “Urban barangays in the Philippines (Based on 2010 CPH),” (Manila, Philippines, 7 June 2013) (Online). The Technical Notes on the Labor Force Survey (LFS) use the following guidelines to classify urban vis-à-vis rural areas: (a) Population density in all cities and municipalities of at least 1,000 persons per square kilometer; (b) Population density in poblaciones or central districts of municipalities of at least 500 persons per square kilometer; (c) Poblaciones or central districts not included in (a) or (b) regardless of population size, which have the following: (i) Street pattern or

the total land area of Ormoc amounting to 61,360 hectares, 26,298.28 hectares are devoted to agriculture.<sup>215</sup> Of this figure, 4,600 hectares are identified as irrigated, 600 hectares as rain-fed lowland, 400 hectares as rain-fed upland, 200 hectares as aquaculture, and 600 hectares as mariculture.<sup>216</sup>

It must be noted that land ownership in the Philippine archipelago was liberalized only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, although with limited success under the Spanish colonial government. In Manila, the Head Office of Woodlands (*Direccion General de Montes*) was established in 1863 with the mandate of privatizing unclaimed lands and forests based on basic provisions of Spanish land law.<sup>217</sup> At the provincial and municipal levels, the offices of public scribes (*escribano public*) and registrars of property were opened, along with the assignment of salaried surveyors and property assessors, although this state-based agenda and project had not been fully implemented prior to the twentieth century in many parts of the Philippines. The customary practice in the past had been to simply cultivate public lands, which theoretically belonged to the crown but was generally perceived as a common good. In Ormoc, as in the rest of the country, lands were either in the public domain (state-owned) or privately-owned. The governing land law for more than seventy years had been Commonwealth Act 141 or the Public Land Act of 1936, which provided a system for legalizing undocumented private land rights of Filipinos found to be occupying and cultivating such lands for a certain period of time. In a 1950s survey, it was found that 221 landholdings exceeded 1,000 hectares in size, while the majority of

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networks, with either parallel or right angle orientation; (ii) At least six establishments (commercial, manufacturing, recreational, and/or personal services at least once a month); (iii) At least three of the following: (1) A town hall, church, or chapel with religious services at least once a month; (2) A public plaza or cemetery; (3) A public plaza or building where trading activities are carried on at least once a month; and (4) A public building like school, hospital, puericulture and health center or library; (d) Barangays with at least 1,000 inhabitants meeting the conditions set forth in (c) above, and where the occupation of the inhabitants is predominantly non-farming or non-fishing. All other areas are considered rural.

<sup>215</sup> Department of Education-Region VIII, *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, 88.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> For a discussion on the context of Kabikolan, see N. Owen, *Prosperity without Progress*, 82-87.

landholdings (14,000 holdings) were fifty hectares or more, which was about 42 per cent of all farmlands in the country.<sup>218</sup>

Republic Act 782 was promulgated in 1952 to grant free patents or the voluntary administrative legalization of imperfect titles to those who had continuously occupied and cultivated tracts of agricultural public lands since or prior to 4 July 1945.<sup>219</sup> By 1954, approximately four million hectares of arable public land were estimated open for settlement in the country.<sup>220</sup> Contrasting these developments in Ormoc, only 150 hectares or about 3.33 per cent of the total watershed area by 1962 had been classified as timberland and the rest or 4,350 hectares were classified as alienable and disposable,<sup>221</sup> with large portions allocated to cash crop agriculture notably sugarcane. According to the 1991 investigative report by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Region VIII office, these lands that were classified as alienable and disposable were located within Barangays Patag, Donghol, Biliboy, Bagong, Dolores, Mahayag and Milagro in Ormoc, upland barangays sometimes with slopes of more than eighteen degrees, which by law were classified as forest areas.<sup>222</sup> Most of these lands belonged to the elite families whose origins were Spanish or were Chinese *mestizos*:

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<sup>218</sup> Quoted from A.P. Sorongan, *A Special Study of Landed Estates in the Philippines* (USA, Operations Mission to the Philippines Manila, 1955).

<sup>219</sup> Titled "An Act to Grant Free Patents to Occupants of Public Agricultural Land since or Prior to July Fourth 1945," with a limitation for the issuance of a free patent for tracts of lands not to exceed 24 hectares.

<sup>220</sup> Quoted from "Country Review of the Philippines", Paper presented at the FAO Center on Land Problems in Asia and the Far East (1954), in J.R. Motheral, "Land Tenure in the Philippines," in *Journal of Farm Economics* Vol. 38 No. 2 (Oxford University Press, May 1956), 469.

<sup>221</sup> By virtue of LC Map 2510 dated February 16, 1962. Quoted in the "Investigation Report of the Ormoc City Disaster," Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Region VIII, 9.

<sup>222</sup> Presidential Decree No. 705, otherwise known as The Forestry Reform Code of the Philippines, had been approved only on 19 May 1975, when most upland areas had already been cultivated for decades with some declared as alienable and disposable prior to this law's promulgation. See Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), "Investigation Report of the Ormoc City Disaster." Tacloban City, 14-30 November 1991.

**Table 2.5**

**Family Holdings with more than 5% ownership by 1991**

Owner	Sub-total	
	Holdings by Family (In square meters)	Per cent of total
Larrazabal <sup>a</sup>	4,127,598	15.9
Serafica, H & Sons	2,577,804	9.9
Suan, Francisco	1,941,564	7.5
Torres <sup>b</sup>	1,718,017	6.6
Sumaling, Catalino	1,481,726	5.7
Tan <sup>b</sup>	1,354,886	5.2
TOTAL SURVEYED IN THE LIST	25,945,890	

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Separate entries for Benita Larrazabal, Cora Larrazabal, Esperanza Larrazabal, Iñaki Larrazabal, Potenciano Larrazabal and Sabin Larrazabal.

<sup>b</sup> Separate entries for Vicente Tores [?], Sr., Cecelia [?] Torres, Cecilia vda. de Torres, Vicente Torres, and Vicente Torres Sr.

<sup>c</sup> Separate entries for Antonio Tan, Eduardo Tan, Gerardo Tan et al, Jorge Tan, Oscar Tan, Reynaldo Tan, and Tan et al.

Source: Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Region VIII, "List of Cadastral Lots, Ormoc Cadastre," accessed 25 February 2013.

The tenancy system did not characterize abaca and sugarcane cultivation, especially in the Visayas. The prevalent mode of land ownership and labor management for large-scale abaca and sugarcane plantation had been the *hacienda* system. In this system, ownership and management were controlled within families. Indeed, Don Ramon Aboitiz drew almost exclusively from within family ranks to fill managerial positions in the Aboitiz companies as he "found family members more loyal to the company and trustworthy than outsiders."<sup>223</sup> The administrative structure of *haciendas* usually employed *encargados* and *cabos*, who acted as intermediaries between *hacenderos* and *dumaans* or regular workers, and *sacadas* or contractual workers.<sup>224</sup> In Ormoc, labor had been imported from nearby provinces during harvest seasons. The idea behind *sacadas*, which had been prevalent in Negros *haciendas*, was that contractual laborers returned to their hometowns after the harvest season and went back to the *haciendas* or plantations during the harvest period. In practice, most of these laborers

<sup>223</sup> R. Mojares, *The Story of Aboitiz and Company*, 28.

<sup>224</sup> Y. Nagano-Kano, "The structure of the Philippine sugar industry at the end of the American colonial period and after 1974," 20.

decided to build more permanent houses in the areas within the *hacienda* that the *hacendero* had allowed for temporary barracks or on plots that worker-families erected on their own. In Barangay Nalunopan, one of the plantations owned by Sabin Larrazabal in Ormoc, most of the laborers and their families resided in Purok Uno, the lowest area in the barangay in terms of elevation traversed by a creek. These laborers lived in houses made of light materials, which were totally destroyed by the raging Matutugnao Creek on 5 November 1991, leaving only the sugarcane fields atop the hill virtually unscathed by the floodwaters.

Wages in *haciendas* in Ormoc had historically been lower than average or that mandated by law. Several wage increases from 1951 in the sugar industry, for example, had been undertaken nationally (shown below), but this had not been followed in many sugarcane plantations around the country, including in Ormoc.<sup>225</sup>

**Table 2.6**

**Minimum wage rates in sugar and other industries, 1951-88 (in pesos per day)**

Year	Sugar Industry <sup>2</sup>			Other Industries		
	Mills	Plantation	Non-plantation	Non-agricultural outside Metro Manila	Plantation	Non-plantation
1951	4.00	2.00	2.00	4.00	2.00	2.00
1964	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.50	3.50
1965	6.00	4.00	4.00	6.00	3.50	3.50
1970	8.00	4.75	4.75	8.00	4.75	4.75
1972	11.00	8.00	6.00	8.00	4.75	4.75
1973	11.00	8.00	6.00	8.00	4.75	4.75
1974	11.00	8.00	6.00	9.98	6.73	6.73
1975	11.00	8.00	6.00	9.98	6.73	6.73
1976	11.00	8.00	6.00	10.98	8.98	7.98
1977	11.00	8.00	6.00	13.36	11.36	10.36
1978	11.00	8.00	6.00	14.36	12.36	11.36
1979	13.00	10.00	9.00	21.12	18.32	14.15
1980	24.67	14.00	13.50	27.68	23.78	17.84

<sup>225</sup> Personal interviews with thirteen respondents, with ages ranging from seven (7) to seventy-four (74) years. Interviews were conducted between April and July 2013 at Barangay Nalunopan (pseudonym), Ormoc City, with the assistance of two former residents.



1981	28.66 <sup>3</sup>	18.33	17.17	29.32	24.93	18.48
1982	30.66	19.83	18.17	29.32	24.93	24.48
1983	34.16	22.33	20.67	39.32	32.92	33.50
1984	55.33	32.00	28.50	53.00	44.00	33.50
1985	55.33	32.00	28.50	53.00	44.00	33.50
1986	55.33	32.00	28.50	53.00	44.00	43.50
1987	66.33	42.00	38.50	64.00	54.00	43.50
1988 <sup>4</sup>	66.33	48.50	43.5	64.00	54.00	

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Highest rate prevailing for the year. Includes basic wage and COLA (cost-of-living allowance).

<sup>2</sup> In the sugar industry, “agriculture” refers to farming of all types, including the cultivation and tillage of the soil, dairying, the production, cultivation, growing and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodities, the raising of livestock or poultry, and any activities performed by a farmer or on a farm incidental to or in conjunction with such farming operations, but does not include the manufacturing or processing of sugar, coconut, abaca (spice) [?], tobacco, pineapple or other farm products. “Plantation agricultural” workers are those employed in any plantation or agricultural establishment with an area of more than 24 hectares in a locality or which employs at least twenty (20) workers. All other agricultural workers shall be considered as non-plantation agricultural workers.

<sup>3</sup> Includes 10.00 peso per month allowance under LOI 1016.

<sup>4</sup> Effectively from 1 March 1988 the Department of Labor and Employment issued on 16 February 1988 Order No. 2S 1988, implementing Wage Order No. 5 of the National Wages Council.

Source: National Wages Council of the Department of Labor and Employment, cited in J. Guisti, *The National Congress of Unions in the Sugar Industry of the Philippines (NACUSIP)* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1989), 7.

In a 1938 random survey involving 173 families from thirty-four *haciendas* in the provinces of Occidental Negros, Iloilo, Laguna, Tarlac and Pampanga, it was found that a laborer was paid 0.50 pesos a day.<sup>226</sup> This wage was for a variety of work including “fencing, improving the ditches, cutting tall grasses around the plantation, preparing seed beds, fixing houses, etc.”<sup>227</sup> The average family earning from July to mid-September 1937 was 3.62 pesos, which were pre-milling months. As the milling season drew near there was less work for the laborers, thus the average family earning for fifteen days was 2.25 pesos. Laborers during the 1937 milling season were employed on a *paquiao* (or piece-work or *pakyaw*) system where from 15 November to 27 November 1937 a laborer earned 10.071

<sup>226</sup> T. Runes, *General Standards of Living and Wages of Workers in the Philippine Sugar Industry*, International Research Series (Philippines: Philippine Council Institute of Pacific Relations, 1939).

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

pesos or an average of 0.839 pesos a day.<sup>228</sup> The survey also found that different job descriptions in the *hacienda* received different wages, with the highest for cutters paid at 0.28 peso for every ton of cane cut; 0.40 pesos for haulers of the cane from the field to the railroad line; and 0.05 pesos per ton for the loader of cane onto wagons.<sup>229</sup> Based on these findings, the study debunked the allegations of the *Confederacion de Asociaciones y Plantadores de Caña Dulce, Inc.* in its July 1937 report to Judge Francisco Zulueta of the Court of Industrial Relations that the “diligent and efficient one gets his reward as much as P1.50 a day.”<sup>230</sup> In another study undertaken in 1981-82 on the Hacienda Milagros in Occidental Negros, workers received “the legal minimum wage of P7 a day.”<sup>231</sup> This wage was already below that prescribed by the government as shown in Table 2.6. In Barangay Nalunopan in Ormoc, wages for *hurnal* work<sup>232</sup> in 1984 were between eight and ten pesos.<sup>233</sup>

Population increase in Ormoc from 1939 to 1990 show that the average growth was about 2.31, higher than the growth rate in Region 8 and Leyte province, but lower than that of the capital Tacloban City (see Table 2.7). During the 1980s, Ormoc’s urban population was estimated at 14,100, while rural population was estimated at 90,900.<sup>234</sup> By 1990, urban population had risen to 38,500, while the rural population remained the same at 90,800.<sup>235</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 8. Runes here notes that some pertinent objections had been raised as to the accuracy of the study on the ground because it was not undertaken “during the time when the milling season had not yet begun.” He also added that “[t]his objection was properly raised, but when the field study was being done the point was duly taken into consideration by the investigator.”

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> R. Rutten, *Women Workers of Hacienda Milagros, Wage Labor and Household Subsistence on a Philippine Sugarcane Plantation*, 38. No. 30 Publikatieserie Zuid- en Zuidoost-Azie (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1982).

<sup>232</sup> *Hurnal* is the most manual and unskilled type of job in the sugarcane plantation and as such receive the lowest daily wage. It entails clearing up the fields prior to planting, weeding, and after harvest.

<sup>233</sup> Personal interviews in Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, between April and July 2013.

<sup>234</sup> Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Department of Public Works and Highways, “Table 1.2, Census Population and Labor Force in Selected Four Cities: 1970, 1980 and 1990,” in *Study on the Flood Control for Rivers in the Selected Urban Centers*, Final Report Vol. 3 Supporting Report (February 1995), T-2.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

**Table 2.7**

**Population and Average Annual Rate of Increase, Ormoc City vis-à-vis  
Region VIII, Leyte and Tacloban City, 1939-2010**

Year	Region VIII		Leyte		Tacloban City (Capital)		Ormoc City	
	Population	Average Annual Rate of Increase	Population	Average Annual Rate of Increase	Population	Average Annual Rate of Increase	Population	Average Annual Rate of Increase
1939 <sup>a</sup>							77,349	
1948 <sup>b</sup>	1,765,003	2.11	751,649	0.97	45,421	4.25	72,733	(0.68)
1960 <sup>b</sup>	2,041,011	1.22	876,079	1.28	53,551	1.38	62,764	(1.22)
1970 <sup>b</sup>	2,381,409	1.55	1,020,128	1.53	76,531	3.64	84,563	3.03
1975 <sup>b</sup>	2,599,728	1.77	1,099,848	1.52	80,707	1.07	89,466	1.13
1980 <sup>b</sup>	2,799,534	1.49	1,191,227	1.61	102,523	4.90	104,978	3.25
1990 <sup>b</sup>	3,054,490	0.88	1,367,816	1.39	136,891	2.93	129,456	2.12
1995 <sup>b</sup>	3,366,917	1.84	1,511,251	1.89	167,310	3.84	144,003	2.02
2000 <sup>c</sup>							154,297	
2001 <sup>c</sup>							161,442	
2002 <sup>c</sup>							164,967	
2003 <sup>c</sup>							168,569	
2004 <sup>c</sup>							172,159	
2007 <sup>d</sup>	3,912,936		1,722,036		217,199	1.8	177,524	
2010 <sup>e</sup>	4,101,322	4.8	1,567,984	(8.9)	221,174	1.8	191,200	7.7

Sources:

<sup>a</sup> *The United States High Commission to the Philippine Islands*, Census of the Philippines 1939, Table 1 Population of Municipalities by Barrios (1940-43).

<sup>b</sup> National Statistical Coordination Board, *1990 Regional Social and Economic Trends, Eastern Visayas Region* (Tacloban City, 1990).

<sup>c</sup> Ormoc City Planning and Development Office, "Ormoc City Profile" (Ormoc City, 18 April 2005).

<sup>d</sup> National Statistical Coordination Board, *2012 Regional Social and Economic Trends, Eastern Visayas Region* as of 1 August 2007 (Tacloban City: Regional Division VII, November 2012).

<sup>e</sup> As of 1 May 2010; Ibid.

With a total land area of 46,430 hectares, population density in Ormoc in 1990 was estimated at 2.8 persons per hectare, with 113 persons per hectare in urban areas, and 154 persons per hectare in the city proper alone.<sup>236</sup> Thirty-eight barangays of the total 110 were located in urbanized areas of Ormoc, while twenty-nine of these were classified within the city proper, namely, Barangays Alegria, Bagong Buhay, Batuan, Can-adjeng, Cogon, Doña Feliza Mejia, Don Felipe Larrazabal, Punta, and San Isidro. Nine other barangays were contiguous to the city proper and considered as outlying urban areas. The remaining seventy-two barangays were classified as rural areas, with seven reported as urbanized barangays in the 1990

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., SE-2.

census.<sup>237</sup> The number of households in the urban areas in Ormoc in 1990 was estimated at 8,053, broken down into 2,850 in the city proper and 5,203 in the outskirts of the urban areas of Ormoc. The bulk of households (16,842) were found in rural areas.<sup>238</sup> Average family size in urban areas in Ormoc in the same year was 5.29, while it was not much different in rural areas at 5.14. The picture that emerges is that Ormoc prior to November 1991 hosted a swelling urban center teeming with population, notably in informal settlements such as along the two major rivers of Anilao and Malbasag. Of the twenty-nine barangays identified within the city proper, three barangays—Alegría, Cogon, and Don Felipe Larrazabal—were devastated in November 1991.

Ormoc's unemployment rate in 1990 was 6.5 per cent of the population, which was lower than the 9.2 per cent rate for Leyte province.<sup>239</sup> A profile of Ormoc urban residents based on a 1993 survey among ninety respondents—with thirty of whom had been resettled outside the city proper, thirty who had returned to houses along the riversides, and another thirty who lived in safer parts of the city away from the rivers—provide a picture of Ormoc's urban population immediately prior to and after the 1991 flood, with majority belonging to the informal sector.<sup>240</sup> About forty-two (42) per cent had been engaged in small-scale retail businesses, twenty-seven (27) per cent were undertaking service jobs, and twenty-five (25) per cent were unemployed. Only seven (7) per cent of those surveyed were employed in the private and government sectors.<sup>241</sup> In terms of education, forty-two (42) per cent of respondents had dropped out of school prior to high school.<sup>242</sup> About eighteen (18) per cent earned less than 20,000 pesos (\$741) per year; forty-two (42) per cent between 20,000-40,000 pesos (\$741-1481);

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., SE-1.

<sup>238</sup> Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Department of Public Works and Highways, "Table 1.3, Population Density and Average Family Size at 1990 Census," in *Study on the Flood Control for Rivers in the Selected Urban Centers*, T-3.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. SE-3.

<sup>240</sup> Quoted in Middleton, Ibid., 16.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

seventeen (17) per cent between 40,000-60,000 pesos (\$1481-2222); and twenty-three (23) per cent above 60,000 pesos (\$2222).<sup>243</sup>

Conditions in the rural areas, however, were the opposite from what was occurring in the city proper. With a population growth rate that was declining in the 1980s to 1990s (-0.02), overcrowding in the rural hinterlands was not a problem despite the initial demographic impact of the abaca and sugar cash crop economies at the turn of the twentieth century. Expansion in rural areas in Ormoc had simply occurred through the clearing of forests and the conversion of these lands into more agricultural areas. In the decades prior to 1991, Ormoc's cultivated areas in the watershed were allocated for various crops such as sugar and pineapple.

Aside from agriculture, there were three large-scale industries that contributed substantially to Ormoc's income in 1991. The Tongonan Geothermal Power Plant was located in Barangay Tongonan, and the Ormoc Sugar Company and AA Alcohol<sup>244</sup> were both in Barangay Ipil. There were also small and cottage industries, numbering 107 and employing less than ten (10) laborers each. Seventy-eight (78) of these establishments was located within the city proper and immediate environs.<sup>245</sup>

Both in rural and urban areas, land tenure was a problem. Rumors of land grabbing perpetuated by elite families in the rural hinterlands abound. Farmers who had previously cultivated lands without evidence of titles suddenly found themselves no longer owners and thus had to either vacate the land or work as tenants in lands owned by elite families. Another method that divested farmers of their land concerned plots sandwiched between those owned by an elite family, who, by threat, intimidation and coercion cut off entry into their lands and as such pressured the farmers to sell at a lower

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> AA Alcohol is called the Leyte Agri Corporation today, which is the "first bioethanol producer and manufacturer in the Philippines with a capacity of 25,000 liters per day." It supplies bioethanol to Pilipinas Shell, Petron, TWA Flying V and Jeti Petroleum. It maintains a distillery in Ormoc City, which also engages in the manufacture of food grade (beverage and denatured) alcohol, with an annual capacity of 8 million liters. See Leyte Agri Corporation, "About Leyte Agri Corp.," last modified 2011 (Online).

<sup>245</sup> Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Department of Public Works and Highways, "Study on the flood control for rivers in the selected urban centers," SE-6.

market price.<sup>246</sup> These stories may partly explain why no small landowners owned tracts of land located in areas in Ormoc where elite families predominated. Through at least three decades, vast tracts of contiguous lands had been brought under the control of only a few families.<sup>247</sup>

In urban areas, where lands had also been fully appropriated as private lots, the riverbanks provided rare areas where migrants could claim a bit of earth to construct their houses and raise families. In the same 1993 survey undertaken by the Japan Development Institute through the Development Management, Inc., of the Philippines, involving ninety (90) respondents, ninety-seven (97) per cent owned their houses prior to the flood, but only ten (10) per cent owned the lots on which their houses stood.<sup>248</sup> Of the remaining, twenty-seven (27) per cent rented the lots, and sixty-three (63) per cent were illegally occupying lots as squatters or informal settlers.<sup>249</sup> About eighty-five (85) per cent of all respondents had houses constructed using light materials, such as *nipa* or plywood, while eighty-seven (87) per cent had roofs made of similarly light materials.<sup>250</sup>

Ormoc had very much been a frontier for many pioneering families in the early twentieth century. Although tracts of land had not been as extensive or abundant as Negros where sugarcane *haciendas* and plantations flourished, thereby creating a new but ostentatious group of fabulously wealthy families, Ormoc did manage to establish and sustain a small elite group of families of its own despite the constraints of its topography and geography. Ormoc was, after all, a small strip of land in eastern Visayas characterized by mountainous areas with slopes that in places were at least eighteen degrees. But by 1991, the majority of the lands in Ormoc were privately owned, including those classified as forestlands. These lands were concentrated in the hands of elite families, while rural and urban

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<sup>246</sup> Based on informal discussions with Ormoc residents in Ormoc City from March to October 2013.

<sup>247</sup> See M. McLennan, "Land and tenancy in the Central Luzon Plain," *Philippine Studies* Vol. 17 No. 4 (Ateneo de Manila University, 1969), 651-682.

<sup>248</sup> Quoted in R. Middleton, "Causes of the Ormoc flash flood disaster in Leyte, Philippines," 16.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

communities were both characterized by socio-economic vulnerability brought about by land insecurity and increasing marginalization.

**Chapter 3** brings the discussion about agricultural involution and its impact on the environment into sharp focus by analysing the gradual but systematic deforestation of Ormoc's watershed area.

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## IN THE MIDST OF A SHRINKING FOREST

*Those palms, as well as other trees which the whole island produces in abundance, shade the roads to a great extent—providing a comfort and refreshing coolness indispensable for those of us who must travel on foot for lack of any other convenience; throughout the island the roads traverse groves and forests, with foliage so cool and abundant that even at high noon the sun caused us no annoyance. Many of the trees have trunks more than twelve brazes in circumference, which are sawed into excellent planks.*

- P. Chirino, “Relacion de las Islas Filipinas,” in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, translated from the original, edited and annotated by E. Blair and J. Robertson 10-12, 280-282, referring to the island of Leite

In the aftermath of the November 1991 tragedy in Ormoc, when the country was searching for answers and government agencies offered explanations, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) pointed out that had there been adequate forest cover in the Ormoc watershed, floodwaters would not have been more than four feet deep.<sup>251</sup> Experts blamed the conversion of forestlands into sugarcane plantations, a process beginning in 1952, as the root cause of the flash flood.

The rhetoric of blaming illegal logging in the wake of massive disasters in the Philippines reflects the fundamental recurring dilemma in the governance of natural resources. These dilemmas revolve around questions of law enforcement versus policy, the jurisdiction of national versus local governments, and the demands of development versus conservation. The 1975 Revised Forestry Code explicitly mandated that “[o]nly the utilization, exploitation, occupation or possession of any forest lands and grazing lands, or any activity therein, involving one or more of its resources, *which will produce the optimum benefits to the development and progress of the country, and the public welfare*, without impairment or with the least injury to its resources, shall be allowed” (emphasis supplied). It further stated that “[a]ll measures shall be taken to achieve an appropriate balance between growth and harvest or use of forest products in forest lands.” But it also

<sup>251</sup> Cited in H. Severino, “Ormoc revisited”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21-22 April 1992.



provided for the President to “amend, modify, replace, or rescind any contract, concession, permit, license or any other form of privilege granted herein” in the name of national security. Furthermore, although “[a]ll measures shall be taken to protect the forest resources from destruction, impairment and depletion,” “[t]he privilege to harvest timber in alienable and disposable lands and civil reservations shall be given to *those who can best help in the delineation and development of such areas* in accordance with the management plan of the appropriate government exercising jurisdiction over the same” (emphasis added). These provisions leave no doubt as to the priority of the government in the exploitation of natural resources for economic development. The task of policing forest utilization rests squarely with the DENR, in particular the Forest Management Bureau (renamed from the Bureau of Forest Management of 1973). These government offices, however, were commonly perceived after the Martial Law era as highly corrupt, inefficient and ineffective.<sup>252</sup>

In the case of the Ormoc 1991 tragedy, public sentiment had been quick to put the blame on illegal logging. The Aquino government at that time, besieged by public criticism, argued that illegal logging could not have been the culprit as there were no trees left to log in Ormoc anyway!<sup>253</sup> DENR Secretary Fulgencio Factoran reasoned that Ormoc City had no forest cover for the last forty years since the area had been classified as alienable and disposable starting in 1952.<sup>254</sup> However, public outcry against illegal logging

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<sup>252</sup> See J. van der Ploeg, M. van Weerd, A. Masipiqueña, and G. Peerson, “Illegal logging in the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park The Philippines,” in *Conservat Soc* (serial online) 2011 Vol. 9 No. 3, 202-215 (Online); and, J. Teehankee, “The state, illegal logging, and environmental NGOs in the Philippines,” in *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* Vol 9 No.1 (University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, 1993), 19-34.

<sup>253</sup> See, for example, C. Pablo, “Illegal logging caused floods,” *Malaya*, 8 November 1991, 1&3; “Killer flood blamed on denuded forests,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 November 1991, 1&9; F. Lobo, “Illegal loggers blamed,” *Manila Bulletin*, 12 November 1991, 1&22; R. Villadiego, “4 mayors tagged Leyte illegal loggers,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 12 November 1991, 1&14; A. Andrade, “Leyte declares war vs illegal loggers,” *Philippine Times Journal*, 14 November 1991, 16; “Aquino on Leyte flood: What illegal logging?” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 November 1991, 1&12; N. Castro, “National indignation against illegal loggers,” *Philippine Times Journal*, 18 November 1991, 5; T. Valderrama, “Plant trees to avert another tragedy—Cory,” *Philippine Times Journal*, 18 November 1991, 1&3.

<sup>254</sup> P. Arias, “Ormoc: Freak disaster,” *Manila Bulletin*, 12 November 1991, 1&15.

became so pronounced that President Corazon Aquino ordered an investigation into illegal logging a week after the tragedy.<sup>255</sup>

Section 68 of Presidential Decree No 705, as amended by Executive Order No. 277 (1987), defines illegal logging in the Philippines as:

Sec. 68. Cutting, gathering and/or collecting timber or other forest products *without license*. Any person who shall cut, gather, collect or remove timber or other forest products from any forest land, or timber from any forest land, or timber from alienable and disposable public land or from private land, *without any authority*, or possess timber or other forest products *without the legal documents as required under existing forest laws and regulations*, shall be punished with the penalties imposed under Article 309 and 310 of the Revised Penal Code: Provided, that in case of partnerships, associations, or corporations, the officers who ordered the cutting, gathering, collection, or possession shall be liable, and if such officers are aliens, they shall, in addition to the penalty, be deported without further proceedings on the part of the Commission on Immigration and Deportation (emphasis supplied).

Both the national government, through the DENR by virtue of Executive Order No. 192,<sup>256</sup> and local government units (LGUs) through Republic Act 7160,<sup>257</sup> are responsible for safeguarding the country's ecological balance.<sup>258</sup> With the DENR's statement that the conversion of forestlands in Ormoc had been responsible for the disaster, the tension between national and local governments vis-à-vis environmental management and protection was highlighted as a key factor in the management of the unfolding disaster. Deforestation is not only illegal

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<sup>255</sup> A. Pamintuan and F. Verga, "Cory orders probe of illegal logging; Factoran says 4 Leyte Mayors involved," *Philippine Star*, 12 November 1991, 1&5.

<sup>256</sup> Executive Order (E.O.) No. 192, "Providing for the Reorganization of the Department of Environment, Energy and Natural Resources; Renaming it as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and for other purposes," 10 June 1987.

<sup>257</sup> Republic Act (R.A.) No. 7160, "An Act Providing for a Local Government Code of 1991," 10 October 1991.

<sup>258</sup> See R. Oliva, "Philippine Forest and Wildlife Law Enforcement: Situationer and Core Issues," Philippine Environmental Governance 2 Project (ECOGOV 2) (Manila: USAID, 12 March 2007).

logging, but also a systematic process of clearing forests often sanctioned by government policies and programs over many decades.<sup>259</sup>

## **Deforestation and forest degradation in the Philippines**

Data on Philippine forest cover is notoriously scant. A noted scholar once remarked that “many records are incomplete, lost, of dubious quality, or may have been deliberately manipulated or destroyed by government officials.”<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, when Spanish colonizers first arrived in 1521, there was approximately twenty-seven (27) million hectares of forest across the archipelago.<sup>261</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, forest cover shrank to twenty-one (21) million hectares or seventy (70) per cent of the total land area.<sup>262</sup> By the late 1990s, rapid deforestation occurred resulting in only about 6 million hectares or 20 per cent of the land area remaining forested, with less than one million hectares of primary forests.<sup>263</sup> In the last century alone, the Philippines lost about fifteen (15) million hectares of tropical forest, with the average deforestation rate from 1969 to 1973 of 170,000 hectares per year.<sup>264</sup>

Deforestation is defined as “the complete removal of existing forests and their replacement by other forms of land use.”<sup>265</sup> Differentiated from forest degradation, which is defined as a gradual process of decline in forest production potential due to logging, grazing or fuel wood collection, deforestation is considered as a measurable process. It can occur through

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<sup>259</sup> Indeed, Pulhin and Dizon go further by stating that forest policies enacted by the Philippine government had been highly regulatory, centrally-controlled and industry-biased. See J. Pulhin and J. Dizon, “Politics of Tenure Reform in the Philippine Forest Land,” (No publication place and date), accessed 26 December 2016 (Online).

<sup>260</sup> D. Kummer, *Deforestation in Postwar Philippines*, Geography Research Paper No. 234 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 39-43.

<sup>261</sup> J. Pulhin, “Trends in forest policy of the Philippines,” in *IGES Forest Conservation Project, Policy Trend Report 2001/2002*, accessed 14 August 2015, 29 (Online).

<sup>262</sup> R.D. Lasco, R.G. Visco and J.M. Pulhin, “Secondary forests in the Philippines: Formation and transformation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” in *Journal of Tropical Forest Science* Vol. 13 No. 4 (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Forest Research Institute Malaysia, 2001), 653; also J. Pulhin, J. Dizon, R.V. Cruz, D. Gevaña, and G. R. Dahal, “Tenure Reform on Philippine Forest Lands: Assessment of Socio-economic and Environmental Impacts,” *Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)*, accessed 26 December 2016) (Online).

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> D. Kummer, *Deforestation in Post-War Philippines*, 2.

clear-cutting and selective logging followed by agriculture.<sup>266</sup> Analysis of digitized land-use maps for 1934 and 1988, as well as a 1941 road map of the Philippines, showed that the country lost a total of 9.8 million hectares of forests in that period.<sup>267</sup> The average annual deforestation rate was estimated at 180,959 hectares, with more than half (57.2%) of forests in 1934 disappearing by 1988.<sup>268</sup>

During World War II, logging production in the country declined. However, a sizeable number of Filipinos took refuge in dense forests and practiced farming with unknown consequences to the forest cover.<sup>269</sup> After 1945, with the Philippines undergoing rapid economic reconstruction, forest harvesting and log exportation were allowed unrestricted.<sup>270</sup> In addition, farming in forests during the immediate post-war period increased due to the continued shortage in food production. The overall effect of these activities on forest cover is also unknown.<sup>271</sup> It was estimated that by 1950, forest cover comprised fifty-five (55) per cent of total land area.<sup>272</sup> The only forest management control imposed at that time was the requirement that the diameter of trees to be cut had to be fifty (50) centimeters.<sup>273</sup> Indiscriminate forest destruction continued unabated until the 1950s, when the first selective logging system was implemented. Indeed, a now missing report by the National Economic Council (NEC), which was based on reports submitted by district foresters and the Bureau of Forestry central office in 1959, show that commercial forests or forests of commercial species, where the volume of trees greater than thirty (30) centimeters at diameter, breadth and height is greater than forty (40) cubic hectares, had decreased to alarming levels by approximately 2.1 million hectares.<sup>274</sup> Non-commercial

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>267</sup> S. Dawning, L. Iverson and S. Brown, "Rates and patterns of deforestation in the Philippines: Application of geographic information system analysis," in *Forest Ecology and Management* 57 (1993) (Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., Amsterdam, 1993), 1-16.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>269</sup> D. Kummer, *Deforestation in Post-War Philippines*, 45.

<sup>270</sup> S. Dawning, L. Iverson and S. Brown, "Rates and patterns of deforestation in the Philippines," 3.

<sup>271</sup> D. Kummer, *Deforestation in the Philippines*, 45.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

forests, on the other hand, had also decreased by 0.6 million hectares.<sup>275</sup> These developments indicated the rapid conversion of both commercial and non-commercial forests to brushland, a new category identified in the NEC report, which had been defined as open land dominated primarily by brush and shrub.<sup>276</sup> As such, between 1953 and 1957, forest cover was estimated at 13,173,000 hectares or 44.3 per cent of total land area. Annual rates of deforestation in the major islands of the Philippines had been estimated as follows (in hectares): Mindanao (-91,564 for the years 1952-1963), Palawan (-4,191 for the years 1948-1964), Visayas (-31,839 for 1968), Luzon (-76,311 for 1967), and nationwide (-203,905).<sup>277</sup> Estimates of forest cover in the Philippines range between 25 and 30 per cent of total land area between 1974 and 1980.<sup>278</sup> Region VIII (Eastern Visayas) in particular, where the island of Leyte belonged, had 12,854 square kilometers of forest in 1934, but only 5,434 square kilometers of forest in 1988, with forest loss estimated at 57.7 per cent.<sup>279</sup>

Several factors have been attributed as the main causes of deforestation and the degradation of forests in the Philippines. The “system of shifting agriculture by ignorant, irresponsible persons,” or *kaingin*, was noted as one of the most devastating causes of “forest damage,” particularly in the northern boundary of Negros Occidental.<sup>280</sup> Other causes identified include the various unorganized human activities in forest areas, such as squatting, encroachment and migration of landless lowlanders into upland forests as well as government-sponsored settlement schemes.<sup>281</sup> However, studies have shown that deforestation in the country is caused mainly by logging (both legal and illegal) followed by the expansion of ‘frontier’ agriculture.<sup>282</sup> The building up of roads and the opening up of forests have

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 48-49. These figures, however, had been argued to be inaccurate.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> S. Dawning, L. Iverson, and S. Brown, “Rates and patterns of deforestation in the Philippines,” 11.

<sup>280</sup> H.D. Everett and H.N. Whitford, *A Preliminary Working Plan for the Public Tract of the Insular Lumber Company, Negros Occidental, P.I.* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1906), 665.

<sup>281</sup> J.B. Ooi, *Depletion of the Forest Resources in the Philippines* (Singapore: ASEAN Economic Research Unit, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1987).

<sup>282</sup> D. Kummer, *Deforestation in the Philippines*, 62.

been shown to result in deforestation. A geographic information system analysis of land-use maps for 1934 and 1988 and a 1941 road map of the country support the finding that the presence of major roads was an important factor affecting deforestation.<sup>283</sup> Indeed, the closer a forest was to roads, the higher the rate of deforestation, so that nearly seventy-eight (78) per cent of the 2.1 million hectares of forests within 1.5 kilometer of roads in 1934 was removed by 1988.<sup>284</sup> Concomitant to the loss of forest cover and the increase in the construction of roads, the number of farms grew from 1.6 million in 1948, occupying 57,266 square kilometers, to 3.4 million in 1980 with 97,252 square kilometers.<sup>285</sup>

### **The legal regime governing forests in the Philippines**

During the Spanish era, there were already a few small sawmills mostly in Manila and run by steam or water. Logging was not yet an industry, but deforestation was already emerging as a problem, with provinces around Manila such as Cavite, Morong and the Isla de Corregidor reportedly having been extensively deforested by the 1870s.<sup>286</sup> Abra and Laguna were also already extensively logged, while Cebu and Bohol in the same period only had an estimated 6.6 and eleven (11) per cent forest cover, respectively.<sup>287</sup> In the Visayas, areas such as Siquijor, Negros, Samar and Leyte were among those still with primary forests, although these forests were smaller in scale and were not identified as main timber-producing areas. Bulacan, Masbate, Mindoro, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Romblon, Zambales and Tayabas had the distinction of being sources of commercial timber.<sup>288</sup> The free use of timber during this era was still authorized under a gratuitous license.<sup>289</sup> Spanish forest laws in fact were based on the (*Recopilacion de las Leyes de Indias* promulgated in 1594, which had a twofold objective: to protect indigenous people's right to cut timber from forests and to limit all

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<sup>283</sup> S. Dawning, L. Iverson, and . Brown, "Rates and patterns of deforestation in the Philippines," Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>286</sup> G. Bankoff, "A month in the life of José Salud, Forester in the Spanish Philippines, July 1882," in *Global Environment* 3 (2009), 13 (Online).

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

activities detrimental to the growth of forests.<sup>290</sup> By 1863, the *Inspeccion General de Montes* was established under the *Direccion General de Administracion Civil*, the first official forestry service in the archipelago, to ensure that logging was monitored in terms of species of trees cut and areas of logging.<sup>291</sup> The discharge of its mandate fell on one (1) inspector and four (4) assistants.<sup>292</sup> At its height in 1881, the agency was comprised of a team of nine (9) foresters, fifty-six (56) assistants, six (6) senior and fifty (50) minor guards plus a number of clerks, porters and orderlies, with senior personnel commonly recruited from Spain and assistant foresters who were “natives as a rule.”<sup>293</sup> By 1893, the Spanish government declared that all public lands without official titles were properties of the crown, following the feudal concept of *jura regalia*, where the king was the head of state who assumed power over all land and water in a territory under jurisdiction. The primary legislation that guided the exploitation of forests in the country and thus the work of the *Inspeccion General de Montes* was the provisional forestry regulations of 8 February 1873, which classified all forestlands either as being utilized for agricultural development and those that cannot be logged for reasons of environmental sensitivity.<sup>294</sup> It was only on 13 November 1884, however, when a royal decree imposed fees of ten (10) per cent on the assessed value of cut timber, introduced other fees for logging due to other purposes and on minor forest produce, limited the amount that could be cut for personal use, and mandated that all future laws conform to these provisions.<sup>295</sup>

American colonization brought about the institutionalization of state-controlled forest governance. By 1900, the first forest legislation enacted by the United States government decreed the need to regulate the cutting,

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<sup>290</sup> G. Bankoff, “‘The tree as the enemy of man:’ Changing attitudes to the forests of the Philippines, 1565-1989,” in *Philippine Studies* Vol. 52 No. 3 (Ateneo de Manila University, 2004), 320-344 (Online).

<sup>291</sup> G. Bankoff, “A month in the life of José Salud,” 32.

<sup>292</sup> G. Bankoff, “The tree as the enemy of man,” 320-344.

<sup>293</sup> G. Bankoff, “A month in the life of José Salud,” 26. Also G. Ahern, *Special Report of Captain George P. Ahern, Ninth US Infantry in charge of Forestry Bureau, Philippine Islands, covering the period from April 1900 to July 30, 1901*, Division of Insular Affairs, War Department. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901 (Online).

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> G. Bankoff, “The tree as the enemy of man,” 330.

transportation and payment of forest charges on forest products. Timber cut for personal use continued to be free of charge, with the provision that it be cut using a license secured through a certificate from Municipal Presidents.<sup>296</sup> Philippine Act No. 222 in September 1901 placed the Bureau of Forestry under the supervision of the newly established Department of Interior, which was mandated to oversee a wide range of public functions including security, counter-insurgency, community development, rehabilitation, and the protection of natural resources. The Philippine Organic Act of 1902, which essentially established an elected Philippine Assembly, also included among its key provisions the conservation of natural resources. For the first time, the notion of public domains<sup>297</sup> as a property of the state was emphasized in the prohibition against the sale or lease of public lands. The exemption, however, was for agricultural areas that were “unoccupied, unreserved unappropriated agricultural public land,” which did not exceed sixteen (16) hectares. Indeed, this exception is important to consider: “no timber lands forming part of the public domain shall be sold, leased, or entered until the Government of said Islands, upon certification of the Forestry Bureau that said lands are more valuable for agriculture than for forest uses, shall declare such lands so certified to be agricultural in character.”<sup>298</sup>

The priority given to agriculture was again emphasized in the Homestead Act of 1903 when it identified what lands could be applied for: “non-mineral, does not contain valuable deposits of coal or salts, is *more*

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<sup>296</sup> F. Tamesis, *Philippine Forests and Forestry*,” in *Unasylva* Vol. 2 No. 6, FAO Corporate Document Repository. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, November-December 1948 (Online).

<sup>297</sup> “Public domain” and “public lands”, based on *Barker vs. Harvey* (1901), were deemed equivalent terms, a concept used in the interpretation of Act No. 926 or the Homestead Act of the Philippines enacted on 7 October 1903. See Separate Opinion of J. Tracey in G.R. L-3793 *Cirilo Mapa vs the Insular Government* (19 February 1908) (Online).

<sup>298</sup> The Philippine Organic Act of 1902, sec. 18. This Act was superseded by the Philippine Autonomy Act of 1916. In relation to public domain, the 1916 Act maintained that “Acts of the Philippine Legislature with reference to land of the public domain, timber, and mining, thereafter enacted, shall not have the force of law until approved by the President of the United States” (sec. 9). In G.R. No.L-3793 of February 19, 1908, the question of what constituted agricultural land was raised. The Supreme Court in an *en banc* decision ruled that “agricultural land” as used in Act No. 926 (Homestead Act) “means those public lands acquired from Spain which are not timber or mineral lands,” in effect all lands, except existing forests and mineral lands.



*valuable for agricultural than forestry purposes*” [emphasis supplied].<sup>299</sup> In 1904, the Philippine Forest Act declared all forest lands as government land, and mandated the Bureau of Forestry as the primary agency responsible in managing the country’s forests and issuing licenses for commercial logging. That same year, the American colonial government introduced commercial logging in the Philippines, with the Insular Lumber Company as one of the first to be granted a twenty-year 300-square kilometer renewable logging concession in Northern Negros.<sup>300</sup> Dipterocarp lumber, also known as Philippine mahogany, was introduced to the world market.<sup>301</sup>

The issue of *kaingin* or swidden agriculture, an old practice by farmers, remained an anathema to the emerging concept of public domains under the control of the state. In June 1874, in a bid to formalize the system of ownership of forestlands and resources, the Spanish government first banned and prohibited its practice. By June of that same year, a Royal Decree made it a crime to “cut any timber for commercial purposes in left over deforested areas of Cebu and Bohol.”<sup>302</sup> In effect, the forests especially those found in low-lying areas that had been communally used in the past, were no longer free-access resources.<sup>303</sup>

As early as 1906, the weakness of existing land laws began to emerge, notably in the creative manipulation of these laws to determine ownership of “public domains,” a practice best put to use not by small *kainginiñeros*, but by large agriculturalists who owned bigger tracts of land. The latter obviously had more to gain by converting forestlands into agricultural lands. The “system of shifting agriculture by ignorant, irresponsible persons” in the northern boundary of Negros Occidental, noted

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<sup>299</sup> Act No. 926, entitled “An Act Temporarily to Provide for the Administration of the Affairs of Civil Government in the Philippine Islands, and for Other Purposes,” Sec. 2.

<sup>300</sup> J. Pulhin, U. Chokkalingam, R.J. Peras, R. Acosta, A. Carandang, M. Natividad, R. Lasco, and R. Lazal, “Chapter II, Historical overview,” in *One Century of Forest Rehabilitation in the Philippines, Approaches, Outcomes and Lessons*, edited by Unna Chokkalingam, A. Carandang, J. Pulhin, R. Lasco, R.J. Peras, and T. Toma. (Jakarta, Indonesia: Center for International Forestry Research, 2006) (Online). Also see H.D. Everett and H.N. Whitford, *A Preliminary Working Plan for the Public Tract of the Insular Lumber Company, Negros Occidental, P.I.*

<sup>301</sup> J. Pulhin et al, “Chapter II, Historical overview,” 10.

<sup>302</sup> Forest Management Bureau, *Historical Background Slider*. Manila: Department of Environment and Natural Resources, accessed 28 December 2016 (Online).

<sup>303</sup> Ooi Jin Bee, *Depletion of the Forest Resources in the Philippines*, 28.

as one of the most devastating causes of “forest damage”, was blamed on *kaingañeros*, who were more visible.<sup>304</sup> Areas of timber or brushland about twenty-five (25) acres<sup>305</sup> or less were cleared with fire during the months of January, February and March, just prior to April when the rains started. These areas were then utilized for the cultivation of corn, *camote* or sweet potato, and sometimes tobacco for one to three years.<sup>306</sup> The small *kaingañero* would then abandon the area to find another spot in the forest where he could repeat the process. In reality, however, it would be the sugar landowners who benefited most from *kaingin* as they “evidently encourage[d] and inspire[d] many of the clearings in the public forest, with the object of securing the land after it was abandoned by the authors of the *caingins*”.<sup>307</sup> A report further observed that large sugar landholders then attempted to “secure the land through homesteads made by persons dependent upon them”.<sup>308</sup> Land acquisition by landowners thus resulted in a forested area first being cleared immediately after an application for homesteading or even prior to making such an application, but before its approval or disapproval. By 1936, “The Public Land Act” explicitly prioritized the disposition of public lands suitable for agricultural purposes for homestead purposes, sale, lease, or confirmation of imperfect or incomplete titles. More importantly, the law increased the maximum allowable application for homestead to twenty-four (24) hectares.<sup>309</sup>

In the 1900s, total public forests covered an area of more than 40,000,000 acres<sup>310</sup> with less than half a million acres held by private

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<sup>304</sup> H.D. Everett and H.N. Whitford, *A Preliminary Working Plan for the Public Tract of the Insular Lumber Company, Negros Occidental, P.I.*, 665.

<sup>305</sup> About 10.1171 hectares.

<sup>306</sup> H.D. Everett and H.N. Whitford, *A Preliminary Working Plan for the Public Tract of the Insular Lumber Company, Negros Occidental, P.I.*, 665.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. Kummer, however, argues that *kaingin* as commonly equated with shifting cultivation, is problematic. The agricultural practices in the uplands can consist of “traditional shifting cultivation (long fallow periods), permanent/intensive agriculture, backyard gardens, grazing, or any combination of these,” which unfortunately he says, does not have reliable data on how extensive the practices are, where they are taking place (whether grassland, brushland or secondary or primary forests), or how often farmers do shift plots. As such, the practice of *kaingin* is difficult to substantiate. See D. Kummer, *Deforestation in the Philippines*, 88.

<sup>308</sup> H.D. Everett and H.N. Whitford, *A Preliminary Working Plan for the Public Tract of the Insular Lumber Company, Negros Occidental, P.I.*, Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Commonwealth Act No. 141, Chapter 3 Section 19.

<sup>310</sup> Approximately 16 million hectares.

owners.<sup>311</sup> Manila was the principal lumber market with five of the most important mills in the country situated there and with timber being shipped regularly from the provinces. These five mills had a combined total capacity of 100,000 board-feet per day.<sup>312</sup> By virtue of an act of Congress in 1902, free exclusive licenses for logging were granted for terms up to twenty years. These licenses gave license holders the right to exploit certain forest products.<sup>313</sup> Only stumpage charges were imposed ranging from 0.50 pesos to 2.50 pesos per cubic meter, equivalent to \$1 to \$2. However, the imposition of these charges made land purchasing a more attractive option because land taxes were non-existent at that time.<sup>314</sup> There were also no export duties on timber or manufactured products. Logs from the Philippines imported into the United States were admitted tax-free, while the import of sawmill and logging machineries in Manila incurred only a five (5) per cent *ad valorem* tax. In addition to these outright incentives provided by the American colonial government to encourage investments in the country's lumber industry, the Bureau of Forestry also acted, not as regulator of the forests, but as a crucial support to ensure the financial success of aspiring lumbermen.<sup>315</sup>

Labor for the timber industry was plentiful, especially in areas where there was already a population employed on large sugar estates.<sup>316</sup> Indeed, the problem was not so much concerned with native labor, but rather American labor that had to be secured from the United States. In the 1900s, an American logging superintendent was paid an annual wage of 4,200

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<sup>311</sup> G. Ahern, "Opportunities for lumbering in the Philippine Islands," *Circular No. 1* (Philippine Islands: Bureau of Forestry, 1 December 1906), 709.

<sup>312</sup> In addition, according to Ahern, the leading lumber dealers were John Gibson, Insular Lumber Company, Cadwaller & Co., Philippine Lumber and Development Company, Tuason & Sampedro, and California-Manila Lumber and Commercial Company (710). G. Ahern, "Opportunities for lumbering in the Philippine Islands," 647 and 710.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.* However, in areas where large stands of timber were found, stumpage fees were in the range of US\$1 and \$6 gold per 1,000 board feet.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 711. Ahern further wrote, that "[A] study of Bulletins Nos. 5 and 6 of this bureau will indicate to the lumbermen what the bureau will do for them. Forest offices will use every effort to make such propositions succeed financially."

<sup>316</sup> This observation was made in relation to Negros Occidental. More importantly, daily wage in the lumber industry in Negros Occidental was P0.50 per day, while those on the sugar estates was 1 to 1.50 pesos per week with food, thus providing the former with the advantage in attracting labor. See H.D. Everett and H.N. Whitford, *A Preliminary Working Plan for the Public Tract of the Insular Lumber Company, Negros Occidental, P.I.*, 666-667.

pesos, while Filipino workers were employed in various capacities as logging assistant, foreman, engineer, firemen, sub-foreman, fellers, buckers, cable men, sled tenders, woodcutters, road builders and water carriers. These Filipino personnel were paid as high as four pesos to as low as 0.50 pesos daily, wages that were considerably higher than those paid in plantations and haciendas.<sup>317</sup> However, the relative infancy of the timber industry at the turn of the century meant that demand was not high and as such, supply was also correspondingly low. Indeed, most of the timber used in the country was imported, which were commonly Oregon Pine and California Redwood.<sup>318</sup> According to a report by the Bureau of Forestry, between 1 July 1904 to 30 June 1905, total imported lumber amounted to 29,679,644 board feet and 9,261 pieces of timber (dimensions unknown), compared with only 139,148.77 cubic meters of timber produced locally.<sup>319</sup> As such, the price of logs was not at all stable and fluctuated daily.<sup>320</sup> In a span of three decades, however, 163 sawmills and logging companies were operational nationwide, with total investments amounting to 30,116,550 pesos by 1940.<sup>321</sup> Majority of these investments (40 per cent) was American, thirty-three (33) per cent Filipino, and the remaining shared among Chinese, British and Japanese investors.<sup>322</sup> Tamesis estimates that total annual timber production grew

<sup>317</sup> The corresponding work and their wages were detailed as follows: 1 American logging superintendent = 4,200.00 pesos per year; 1 American logging assistant = 4.00 pesos per day; 1 Filipino foreman = 1.50 pesos per day; 1 Filipino engineer = 3.00 pesos per day; 1 Filipino engineer = 1.50 pesos per day; 2 Filipino firemen = 0.50 peso per day each; 1 Filipino sub-foreman = 0.60 peso per day; 4 Filipino fellers = 0.65 peso per day each; 6 Filipino buckers = 0.50 peso per day each; 7 Filipino cable men = 0.50 peso per day each; 1 Filipino sled tender = 0.50 peso per day each; 4 Filipino woodcutters for the engines = 0.50 peso per day each; 4 Filipino road builders = 0.50 peso per day each; and 10 Filipino water carriers for the engines = 0.50 peso per day each. H.D. Everett and H.N. Whitford, *A Preliminary Working Plan for the Public Tract of the Insular Lumber Company, Negros Occidental, P.I.*, 668.

<sup>318</sup> G. Ahern, "Opportunities for lumbering in the Philippine Islands," 648.

<sup>319</sup> According to Gardner, 139,147.77 cubic meters if all sawn into lumber would make about 400,000,000 board feet. R. Gardner. "I. Mechanical tests, properties and uses of thirty Philippine woods; II. Philippine sawmills, lumber markets, and prices," *Bulletin No. 4* (Philippine Islands: Bureau of Forestry, 7 September 1906) (Online).

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.* The most valuable timber were Molave, yellow Narra, Red Narra, Dungon, Tindalo, Acle and Betis, all hard woods, with market prices in Manila on 1 August 1906 ranging from a low of 215 pesos to a high of 300 pesos per 1,000 English board feet.

<sup>321</sup> 50 pesos was approximately \$1 at that time. See J. Pulhin et al, "Chapter II, Historical Overview," 10.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

exponentially from 94,000 cubic meters (40 million board-feet) in 1901 to 2 ¼ million cubic meters (1,000 million board-feet) in 1940.<sup>323</sup>

As local timber production increased, the import of lumber principally from the United States correspondingly decreased. Again, Tamesis estimates that in 1941, 520,000 cubic meters (114,900,000 board-feet) and 175,000 cubic meters (74,100,000 board-feet) of timber, or a total of 446,000 cubic meters (189 million board-feet) valued at 8,041,389 pesos were exported from the Philippines, while only 4,935 cubic meters (or 2,091,000 board-feet) of lumber valued at 256,936 pesos was imported.<sup>324</sup> Japan became the biggest recipient of Philippine lumber between the 1960s and 70s.<sup>325</sup>

In terms of deforestation, forest cover declined from seventy (70) per cent in 1900 to just below sixty (60) per cent in the late 1930s.<sup>326</sup> After 1945, however, logging increased dramatically. Deforestation rates were back to pre-war levels of production by 1949. There was a rapid and continuous decrease in forest cover from 1950 to 1988, with the highest rates occurring between 1976 and 1980.<sup>327</sup> It was in the Visayas, where sugarcane plantations proliferated, and not in Mindanao, Palawan or Luzon, where the highest deforestation rates were recorded since 1950. The total deforested area from 1957 to 1987 in the Visayas region amounted to 12,743 square kilometers or a total of 15.84 per cent forest loss.<sup>328</sup> For Kummer (1991), these figures appeared to contradict the notion that Mindanao was the primary destination for rural migrants and the leading area for commercial logging.<sup>329</sup>

Yet while these facts pointed to the rapid depletion of forests, for Kummer (1991), the simultaneous increases in agriculture by area and population in the uplands, as well as the lack of data on these individual

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<sup>323</sup> F. Tamesis, *Philippine Forests and Forestry*.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Statement made by DENR Undersecretary Victor Ramos in "Ormoc floods prick Japan's conscience," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 November 1991, 6.

<sup>326</sup> D. Kummer, *Deforestation in the Philippines*, 45.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., based on Table 10, Superregional deforestation rates, 1950-87.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

processes had contributed to a “seemingly endless controversy” on who should be blamed for deforestation in the country, be it agriculturalists or loggers.<sup>330</sup> However, agriculturalists were often loggers too, as seen in the case of Ormoc. In addition, more often than not, they were also politicians with legislative and discretionary powers over many aspects of government. Historically, politicians with timber interests had thrived in Philippine politics and some had engaged in rent-seeking and “rent-seizing”<sup>331</sup> behaviors that had already been well documented in the past.<sup>332</sup>

The lasting legacy of President Ferdinand Marcos in forestry was the consolidation by state apparatuses of the power to decide how resources were managed and allocated. No timber license during the martial law period, for instance, was approved without Marcos’ authorization. But Marcos was not necessarily all-powerful vis-à-vis an increasingly potent logging bloc that was not ashamed to exercise its clout in influencing legislation to its advantage. By the 1960s, the timber industry’s contribution of as much as twenty-nine (29) per cent to total export earnings made loggers a powerful club of like-minded men. The Philippines was listed in 1965 as the “biggest, single log producer in the world” supplying at least thirty (30) per cent of the world’s requirements.<sup>333</sup> The industry’s earnings peaked in 1973 at \$472 million and accounted for five (5) per cent of the country’s gross national

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>331</sup> Ross defines rent-seizing as “efforts by state actors to gain the right to allocate rents” [original emphasis] in contradistinction to rent creation, which occurs when firms seek rents by bribing politicians and bureaucrats, and rent extraction, when politicians and bureaucrats seek rents by threatening firms with regulations. M. Ross, *Timber Booms and Institutional Breakdown in Southeast Asia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2012), 3-4.

<sup>332</sup> See, for example, M. Vitug, *The Politics of Logging, Power from the Forest* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1993); and, J. Van der Ploeg et al, “Illegal logging in the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park,” 202-215; S. Coronel, Y. Chua, B. Cruz, and L. Rimban, *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and Well-Born Dominate the Congress* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004); and, S. Coronel (ed), *Patrimony: 6 Case Studies on Local Politics and the Environment in the Philippines* (Pasig, Metro Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1996). On rent-seeking behaviors of Philippine politicians and the political economy of the Philippines, see S. Coronel (ed.), *Pork and Other Perks: Corruption and Governance in the Philippines* (Pasig, Metro Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1998); E. Gutierrez, I. Torrente, and N. Narca, *All in the Family: A Study of Elites and Power Relations in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 1992); E. Gutierrez, I. Torrente, and N. Narca, *The Ties that Bind: A Guide to Family, Business and Other Interests in the Ninth House of Representatives* (Pasig, Metro Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1994); J. Lacaba (ed.), *Boss: 5 Case Studies of Local Politics in the Philippines* (Pasig, Metro Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1995).

<sup>333</sup> Vitug, *The Politics of Logging*, 25.

product.<sup>334</sup> This informal bloc of new millionaires whose wealth was based on timber did not only log in the Philippines, but expanded operations to Indonesia and Malaysia as well.<sup>335</sup>

When President Corazon Aquino assumed leadership in 1986, systemic corruption was characteristic of the forestry sector. From the House of Representatives where congressmen held logging concessions or actively lobbied for the timber industry, to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) that was often emasculated in its role as forest protector by a lack of manpower and political clout vis-à-vis politicians and powerful timber barons, to adventurist military personnel and insurgent groups involved in illegal logging or the coddling of illegal loggers, the Philippine forestry sector by 1991 was widely perceived as one of the most corrupt institutions in a country just emerging from the effects of martial law.

More central to the discussion on systematic deforestation were the series of government policies in land redistribution that began as early as 1939 in the quest for social justice. President Manuel Quezon, aiming to contain the increasing unrest in central Luzon, enacted the Rural Program Administration that provided for the purchase and lease of *haciendas* for redistribution to tenants. President Elpidio Quirino, meanwhile, enacted Executive Order No. 355 in October 1950 to redistribute public agricultural lands through the Land Settlement and Development Corporation (LASEDECO). This was intensified under President Ramon Magsaysay, when he replaced LASEDECO with the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA) aimed at resettling rebel returnees by providing them with home lots and farmlands in Palawan and Mindanao. These policies were in fact reflective of decolonizing administrations that prioritized short-term socio-economic solutions to social ills at the expense of the environment, often considered only as an expendable resource to exploit.

By 1975, the Forestry Reform Code of the Philippines<sup>336</sup> defined forests as:

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

- Public forest [which] is the mass of lands of the public domain which has not been the subject of the present system of classification for the determination of which lands are needed for forest purposes and which are not;
- Permanent forest or forest reserves refer to those lands of the public domain which have been the subject of the present system of classification and determined to be needed for forest purposes;
- Forest lands include public forest, the permanent forest or forest reserves, and forest reservations; and,
- Forest reservations refer to forestlands, which have been reserved by the President of the Philippines for any specific purpose or purposes.

Indeed, the conservation of forests in the country had not been considered a priority over development programs. For example, considering the low charges imposed for forest harvesting from the 1950s to the mid-1990s consisting of an *ad valorem* rate ranging from only two per cent to 6.3 per cent of the wholesale log value, the Philippine government charged a little more than \$1 per cubic meter. Indonesia, on the other hand, charged more than \$15 per cubic meter during the same period.<sup>337</sup>

### **Ormoc's topography, geology, climate and forestlands**

Against this backdrop of the Philippines' legal regime on forests vis-à-vis the history of deforestation in the country, a consideration of Ormoc's unique topography and geology is made below, particularly as these relate to its forests, which have some immutable consequences for people's lives and livelihoods.

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<sup>336</sup> Presidential Decree (P.D.) No. 705, as Amended by P.D. No. 1559, P.D. No. 865, P.D. No. 1775, Batas Pambansa (B.P.) Blg 701, B.P. Blg 83, Republic Act (R.A.) No. 7161, Executive Order (E.O.) No. 277 and 83 O.G. No. 31, Revised Forestry Code, Revising Presidential Decree No. 389, Otherwise known as the Forestry Reform Code of the Philippines.

<sup>337</sup> E. Guiang, "Impacts and effectiveness of logging bans in natural forests: Philippines," in *Forest out of Bounds: Impacts and Effectiveness of Logging Bans in Natural Forests in Asia-Pacific*, Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (Bangkok, Thailand: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2001), 105 (Online).



Leyte island itself comprises about 6,200 square kilometers between 124°17' and 125°18' east longitude and between 9°55' and 11°48' north latitude.<sup>338</sup> Geographically, it is bounded on the east by Leyte Gulf and the Pacific Ocean, to the west by the Visayas and Camotes seas, and to the north by the San Juanico Strait, which separates it from the island of Samar. In the south, the Surigao Strait separates it from Mindanao. Leyte is classified as a volcanic terrain, "with most volcanic centers concentrated in the north-central portion of the island and consisting of strato volcanoes, dome complexes, pyroclastic/tephra cones, calderas and compound volcanoes."<sup>339</sup> A central cordillera dominates Leyte, which forms a link from the Bondoc peninsula of southern Luzon, through Masbate, and finally passing into eastern Mindanao, extending in a northwest-southeasterly direction from coast to coast of the main island, including Panaon at the south and Biliran and Maripipi at the north.<sup>340</sup> Thus, floods are not uncommon during the wet season, as all streams have headwaters in the east slope watershed of the central cordillera. This side of the mountains receive more precipitation than the west due to the northeasterly winds of what McIntyre (1951) calls the winter monsoon.<sup>341</sup> Leyte is furthermore composed of two large lowlands: the northern Leyte and the west coast of the Ormoc-Bao river plain.

The presence of the Philippine Fault, which transects Leyte on a northwest-southeast track from northwestern Luzon down to Eastern Mindanao, has resulted in the characterization of all rocks in the general area as "highly sheared and intensely fractured" due to the presence of volcanic landforms.<sup>342</sup> Ormoc itself hosts a geothermal plant in Barangay Tongonan, belying its volcanic origins. Ormoc City has a total land area of 613.6 square

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<sup>338</sup> E. Eller and V. Asio, "The flash flood tragedy of Ormoc: A short analysis from a physio-geographical view," Unpublished article (Visayas State College of Agriculture, Undated).

<sup>339</sup> Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS), "Scientific assessment report: Ormoc City flood on 5 November 1991," Unpublished report (Department of Science and Technology (DOST), 1991).

<sup>340</sup> M. McIntyre, "Leyte and Samar: A Geographical Analysis of the Rural Economies of the Eastern Visayas" (PhD diss. in Geography, Ohio State University, 1951), 10-12.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>342</sup> Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group, "Scientific Assessment Report: Ormoc City flood on 5 November 1991," Unpublished report (Department of Science and Technology (DOST), 1991), 4-5.

kilometers<sup>343</sup> and is bounded on the northwest by the municipalities of Matag-ob and Merida, in the north by Kananga, in the northeast by Jaro, Pastrana and Dagami, and in the south by Albueria. Ormoc Bay bounds the city in the west, while numerous rivers traverse the city plain, notably the Bao River in the north, Pagsangahan in the east, Panilahan and Bagongbong in the south, and the Anilao and Malbasag rivers cutting through the city proper on its eastern and western flanks. The general drainage pattern of these rivers and streams is dendritic, with a drainage density at least 100 meters per hectare while stream frequency is about 0.6 per square kilometer.<sup>344</sup> These features indicate that the watershed is highly erodible. The Bao River and its associated streams flow south from the low mountain divide of Leyte Bay and drain slowly into a broad deltaic plain in the lower fifteen (15) miles (or 24 kilometers) of their courses. This means that flooding is a common occurrence due to poor natural drainage and swampy conditions.<sup>345</sup> Like other Philippine cities established during the Spanish colonial period, Ormoc City occupies a location within the mouths of two major rivers draining out to Ormoc Bay. To compound its geographical and topographical susceptibility to flooding, it has historically been the catchment area of the Anilao and Biten-Malbasag rivers. Topographically, Ormoc is bounded by ridges, with a width of 4.6 kilometers and length of 12.0 kilometers.

The slopes of the Ormoc watershed range from three per cent in relatively flat areas to higher than sixty (60) per cent in steeply sloping areas. Approximately two-thirds of the area has a slope of less than eighteen (18) per cent, while one-third has at least eighteen (18) per cent and above, with the highest elevation approximately 830 meters. Both Anilao and Malbasag Rivers exhibit similar slopes, as they gently rise upward between two (2) per cent to ten (10) per cent up to an elevation of 500 meters (or 0.5 kilometers) above sea level and then rise up to twenty (20) to forty (40) per cent in its highest reaches at about 840 meters (0.840 kilometers) above sea level. The

<sup>343</sup> National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), *City StatWatch Eastern Visayas, 31 January 2013*. Tacloban City, National Statistical Information Center/National Statistical Coordination Board: Comparative data across Eastern Visayas on land area; number of barangays; population statistics; revenue statistics; exports and imports; infrastructure; poverty incidence; education; health services; and crime statistics.

<sup>344</sup> Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group, "Scientific Assessment Report," 4.

<sup>345</sup> M. McIntyre, "Leyte and Samar," 28-29.

Anilao River has a length of 13.8 kilometers, while Malbasag has 10.42 kilometers. According to the consolidated report prepared by the five technical services of the DENR Region VIII (Eastern Visayas) in the aftermath of the 1991 flood, the aggregate length of all the rivers and their respective tributaries is 64.38 kilometers.<sup>346</sup> While Anilao and Malbasag rivers were the most heavily affected watershed areas in 1991, other areas likewise affected were the Naliwatan, Marabong, Barogo, Malitbog and Daguitan rivers to the west. The sweeping floodwaters in Ormoc City in 1991 also converged and coincided with the high tide of Ormoc Bay that day.

Ormoc's watershed areas even during normal periods were notable for the presence of thick accumulations of lahar, which is typically poorly sorted or what the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) described as boulder- to pebble- sized andesitic clasts mixed with matrix or sand. Combine this with the weathering of volcanic rocks due to intense fracturing, and it is not surprising that the area is highly susceptible to landslides. In fact, while the 1991 tragedy had been described as "an unprecedented event which occurs only once in fifty (50) years," Ormoc's topographic characteristics show that natural hazards such as landslides and flooding are 'normal' occurrences.

McIntyre (1951) observed that the soils of Leyte, similar to Samar, is primarily yellow to reddish colored, indicating the presence of iron oxide in the surface and possible leaching. This type of soil, similar to those found in Africa and Cuba, is abundant in well-drained lowland regions, or even in flat-lying cogon lands in the mountains where forest vegetation is lacking. Consequently, it is acid in reaction, "generally infertile although can respond well to fertilization, and moderately erodible."<sup>347</sup> In contrast, the upland soils of Leyte and Samar are more fertile than the leached soils of the plains, and indeed this is where the sugarcane plantations in Ormoc can be found, on

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<sup>346</sup> Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-VIII, "Assessment of the causes of the flooding of Ormoc City, Leyte Island, Philippines: Consolidated Technical Findings of the 5 Technical Services of the DENR Region 8 (Eastern Visayas)." Eastern Visayas, Forest Management; Mines and Geosciences; Environmental Management and Protected Areas; Lands Management; and, Ecosystems Research and Development.

<sup>347</sup> McIntyre, "Leyte and Samar," 106-107.

slopes of 25 to 30 degrees, as these areas are more productive for cultivating sugarcane.

Three types of soils characterize Ormoc. The first, typically found in the lowland near the coast and generally utilized for cultivation, has a mean texture varying from loamy sand (45-90 per cent sand, 5-40 per cent silt, and 5-17 per cent clay) to sandy loam (35-55 per cent sand, 28-40 per cent silt, and 15-25 per cent clay), and is “generally deep with medium to high permeability.”<sup>348</sup> The second type, found in quaternary volcano clastics, has mean texture ranges between clay loam (5-35 per cent sand, 30-50 per cent silt, and 35-45 per cent clay) and silty clay (0-25 per cent sand, 40-65 per cent silt, and 35-45 per cent clay). Highly eroded in most cases, there is also little vegetation in this soil type. The last type, those developed from the quaternary volcanic rocks, is clay (0-25 per cent sand, 30-55 per cent silt, and 45-65 per cent clay) found in higher altitudes where the average inclination is very high and vegetation cover is also missing. As a low permeable type, “surface water is predictably predominant.”<sup>349</sup> In the scientific assessment report of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Ormoc Task Force in November 1991, eighty-five (85) per cent of the Ormoc watershed was classified as agricultural areas given primarily to sugarcane and coconut, while fourteen (14) per cent was grassland and shrubs, and one (1) per cent was built-up areas.<sup>350</sup>

**Table 3.1**

**Land use/vegetation by watershed area, Ormoc City<sup>351</sup>**

LAND USE	SLOPE RANGES (°)	AREA (HA)	SUB-TOTAL AREA	PER CENT (%)
Sugarcane	0-3	14	2,912	66.7
	3-8	2,183		
	8-18	92		
	18-30	186		
	30-50	437		
Coconut	3-8	533	803	18.4

<sup>348</sup> E. Eller and V. Asio, “The flash flood tragedy of Ormoc.”

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group, “Scientific Assessment Report.”

<sup>351</sup> The original report lists figures in this table totalling 4,500 hectares. However, as the numbers did not add up, the correct totals are reflected above.

	8-18	40		
	18-30	80		
	30-50	150		
Grassland	18-30	404	425	9.7
	30-50	21		
Shrubland	18-30	173	173	4
Built-up areas	3-8	52	52	1.2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4,365</b>		<b>100</b>

Source: Land Resource Evaluation Project (LREP), Leyte Province, BSWM (1986) as quoted in Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group, "Scientific Assessment Report: Ormoc City flood on 5 November 1991," 8.

## Growth of the timber industry in Ormoc

At the turn of the twentieth century, Leyte's forests were abundant with such timber as Lauan, Molave, Guijo, Malasantol, Maacasin and Betis.<sup>352</sup> Lumbering in the province only began to emerge as an important industry in the 1900s. Sawmills were recorded in the municipalities of Palompon and Tacloban, which shipped timber to all parts of Leyte.<sup>353</sup>

In Ormoc, it was Dr. Hermenegildo Serafica, a government district health officer from Pangasinan with a salary of seventy-five (75) pesos per month, who introduced commercial logging in the 1930s. He later quit his job in 1931 and commenced life as a sugar planter.<sup>354</sup> In 1936, he built his first sawmill and operated a 5,000-hectare concession. Within five years, Serafica became the wealthiest individual sugar planter in Ormoc, with 500 hectares of sugar lands to his name and an annual income of 30,000 pesos.<sup>355</sup> He invested 50,000 pesos to build another sawmill in the municipality of Kananga in the same year, in partnership with Gregorio Mania, a former

<sup>352</sup> G. Ahern, *Opportunities for Lumbering in the Philippine Islands*, Circular No. 1 (Philippine Islands: Bureau of Forestry, 1 December 1906), 637-643. According to Ahern, Lauan was a light and soft wood used for light and temporary construction, cabinet-making, inferior furniture, and small boats. Molave, on the other hand, was a hard wood most highly valued for general building purposes, shipbuilding, cabinetmaking and turnery. Guijo was moderately hard and is used for general construction and shipbuilding, for carriage wheels and shafts, and inferior furniture. Malasantol was a moderately heavy wood used in general construction, while Macaasin was also a moderately hard wood generally used as flooring, joists, and rafters of houses, and in cabinetwork. Finally, Betis was a high grade structural timber used in general high-grade construction and shipbuilding.

<sup>353</sup> P. Borseth, "Report of the Governor, Province of Leyte," in Appendix H, Annual reports of provincial governors, *Sixth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission to the Secretary of War*, 310.

<sup>354</sup> R. Middleton, "Causes of the Ormoc flash flood disaster in Leyte, Philippines," 9.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

supervisor in the Bureau of Education.<sup>356</sup> In addition to his lumber business, Serafica continued to cultivate his increasingly vast sugar lands. By 1937, he was described in the *Sugar News*, the official organ of the Philippine Sugar Association (PSA), as a “prominent sugar and lumber man.”<sup>357</sup>

During the Japanese occupation of Ormoc beginning 25 May 1942, the logging industry, as with other industries, was brought to a virtual standstill. Most of the large landholders opted to remain within towns directly supervised by the Japanese forces or went to live in the provincial capital, Tacloban, thus leaving the sugarcane estates as well as their forest concessions under the care of tenants.<sup>358</sup> An Administrator of Abandoned Estates, Ramon Advincula, was appointed under the Western Leyte Guerrilla Warfare Forces (WLGF) to recruit laborers during the wartime period to undertake unpaid labor on the sugarcane estates, including forest concessions and sawmills. Forests all over the country were ravaged for the war effort under the Japanese occupation, but the overall extent of deforestation immediately after World War II is unknown.<sup>359</sup> By 1948, other large sugar landholders became loggers too. Feliciano Larrazabal, Potenciano Larrazabal, and Agapito Pongos, all from Basque *mestizo* bloodlines, became important sawmill operators in addition to being sugar planters by this time.<sup>360</sup> Between 1950 and 1960, a total of twenty-two (22) Ordinary Timber Licenses (OTL)<sup>361</sup> was awarded for operation in two Leyte provinces, with five of these in the Ormoc area.<sup>362</sup> Each OTL covered an area of almost 1400 hectares and an annual allowable cut of a little over 20,000 cubic meters. All timber license agreements in Leyte, however, were

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> E. Lear, “The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines, Leyte, 1941-1945,” Data Paper No. 42, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Far Eastern Studies (New York: Cornell University, 1961), 115-117.

<sup>359</sup> D. Kummer, *Deforestation in the Philippines*, 45-46.

<sup>360</sup> R. Middleton, “Causes of the Ormoc flash flood in Leyte, Philippines,” 10.

<sup>361</sup> Ordinary Timber License (OTL) is a short-term commercial license for timber, i.e. for a period of four years and renewable upon expiration. It was later abolished by virtue of Presidential Decree 389, known as the Forestry Reform Code of the Philippines enacted on 5 February 1974, in favor of longer-term licenses of ten (10) and twenty-five (25) years.

<sup>362</sup> R. Middleton, “Causes of the Ormoc flash flood in Leyte, Philippines,” Ibid.

cancelled during the Marcos years, and a total log ban imposed in northern Leyte since 1967.<sup>363</sup>

By the 1970s, Serafica had become one of the wealthiest families in Ormoc with interests in neighboring municipalities in Leyte. Between 1965 and 1970, its logging concession in Barangay Tongonan paved the way for the construction of logging roads.<sup>364</sup> H&Sons Serafica owned 9.9 per cent or 2,577,804 square meters of the total 25,945,890 square-meter lands surveyed within the watershed.<sup>365</sup> The Serafica family then expanded its interests in Ormoc immediately afterwards. By 1979, the Hermenegildo Serafica and Sons Corporation (HSSC) was managing a 290-hectare farm in Barangay Sambulawan in the municipality of Leyte in Leyte province, first utilizing the land for sugarcane, then sorghum, mung bean, and finally cattle-raising.<sup>366</sup> As a ranch, it employed fifteen personnel with responsibility over more than 64 heads of Brahman and Indo-Brazil breeds of cattle purchased from the Larrazabal Farm in Taglawigan, San Isidro, Leyte, and the rest from the Muertegui Farm in Masbate.

A 1987 forest resources inventory undertaken by a Philippine-German group found that by 1989 there was only 96,300 hectares of forest in Leyte, down from the 171,600 hectares recorded in 1969.<sup>367</sup> However, DENR Secretary Ernesto Maceda allowed one firm, Timber Producers and Marketing Corporation (TPMC), to operate in Leyte in November 1986. TPMC began operations in 1987, with a license expiration date in November

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<sup>363</sup> Cited in R. Villadiego, "Factoran bares list of DENR men linked to illegal logging," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 November 1991, 1 & 12.

<sup>364</sup> Local Government of Barangay Tongonan Ormoc City website, "Home." Copyright 2016, accessed 20 June 2016 (Online).

<sup>365</sup> Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), "List of Cadastral Lots, Ormoc Cadastre," Annex in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-Region VIII, *Investigative Report of the Ormoc City Disaster*.

<sup>366</sup> The *hacienda* stopped the cultivation of sugarcane when the market value of sugar dropped. It then shifted to sorghum, but was later stopped again due to pest and disease outbreak in sorghum. It then shifted to mung bean, but this was besieged by the same problems as sugarcane. See H. Napoles, "Animal production and management practices of Hacienda Serafica and Sons Corporation (HSSC) Ranch at Sambulawan, Leyte, Leyte" (Bachelor of Animal Science thesis, Visayas State College of Agriculture, 1986).

<sup>367</sup> Cited in C. Pablo, "Illegal logging caused floods," *Malaya*, 8 November 1991, 1 & 3.

2011.<sup>368</sup> Its total concession area was 26,600 hectares or 27.5 per cent of the remaining forest cover.

### Timber and the Codillas

The story of the Codilla family, the most recent political dynasty in Ormoc, is central to the story of Visayan timber. Theirs is testament to the relative openness of the local economy to recent economic upstarts despite the early monopoly of land and resources by old elite families. The Codilla family will attain political influence only after the November 1991 flood, when the patriarch, Eufrocino Codilla Sr., wrestled political power from the ruling Larrazabal family for the first time. However, the roots of the Codillas in Ormoc date back to the nineteenth century.<sup>369</sup> There had been Codillas serving in public offices very early in Ormoc's history. Reverend Father Lino Codilla, a Cebuano, was assigned as parish priest at the Ormoc Parish from 1892-1910,<sup>370</sup> and Jose Codilla<sup>371</sup> was appointed mayor by the Japanese forces in 1943. In addition, far from being impoverished farmers, the Codillas had also been identified as plantation owners under the Ormoc Sugar Company in 1935.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Rene de Rueda, a consultant with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), who was interviewed in the aftermath of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy. Quoted in C. Pablo, "Illegal logging caused floods," 1&3. Timber Producers and Marketing Corporation (TPMC) was allegedly owned by Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Luis T. Santos. TPMC was also allowed by the DENR to cut some 80,000 cubic meters of logs in the towns of Hinatungan, Hinunangan, Saint Bernard, Silago and Sogod in southern Leyte, and in Baybay, Leyte. In addition, it had also been alleged that TPMC maintained payola for police, military, local officials and the NPA through the so-called revolutionary tax. This payola was managed by a Jimmy Uraya, the TPMC president's brother. See D. Petilla, "Cory exec tagged big illegal logger," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 December 1991, 1&9.

<sup>369</sup> A cursory survey of the Codilla family name in Ormoc, Leyte, in the "Philippine Deaths and Burials, 1726-1957" yield numerous entries. Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, *Family Search*. Copyright 2016, accessed 18 February 2014 (Online). In the "History and Cultural Life of Maticaa," compiled in the "History and Cultural Life of the People of the Communities of Ormoc II District, Ormoc City", in *Historical Data Papers*, a Basilio Codilla was listed as one among fifteen original settler families in the barrio. The barrio of Maticaa was established in 1907.

<sup>370</sup> Ormoc City Public Library, "Briefing Folder, Ormoc City 1989," Unpublished article.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Listed as separate entries: Basilio Codilla, Jose Codilla, and Lucio Codilla. *Executive Orders Relative to Sugar Allocation Issued by the Governor-General during the Year 1935*, Part 3 Nos. 675-795 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, Government of the Philippine Islands, 1936).



Eufrocino Codilla Sr. himself was a successful lumber middleman and had achieved financial success even prior to entering politics in 1992. Born in Barangay Valencia in 1933,<sup>373</sup> Dodong, as he was called, could not afford to go to university due to poverty. However, he was an extraordinarily resourceful man who entered cycling contests for monetary rewards and sold a variety of merchandise like clothes, rice and, later, lumber, GI sheets and nails.<sup>374</sup> It was in selling lumber and construction materials where he built his fortune. But, like all other elites in Ormoc, he soon diversified his business interests. By 1992, he was reported to own a 100-hectare sugar plantation, a cockpit and gasoline station.<sup>375</sup> It is notable that the family already possessed a 90-hectare sugarcane plantation in Barangay Maticaa by 1984, which had expanded from the original six hectares in 1978.<sup>376</sup> Managed by a son, Eduardo Codilla, the plantation employed a total of eighty-five (85) personnel, composed of one farm administrator, three (3) *capatazes*, and twenty-seven (27) laborers per *capataz* paid on an hourly or contractual basis.<sup>377</sup> By the 1990s, another son, Eric Codilla who would become Ormoc mayor for three consecutive terms from July 2004 to June 2013, managed a thriving piggery farm in Barangay Valencia also in Ormoc. The Eric Codilla piggery farm was listed as a sole proprietor medium-scale enterprise operating on a one-half hectare area. In 1991, it had 115 hogs managed by a caretaker and two aides paid on a daily wage basis.<sup>378</sup> Almost by sheer luck,

<sup>373</sup> C. Pedong, "Eufrocino 'Mejares' Codilla: Businessman turned Politician," in *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, Unpublished learning resource material, compiled by the Department of Education Region VIII-Eastern Visayas (Undated), 140-142.

<sup>374</sup> M. Vitug, *Power from the Forest*, 6.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> R. Agbisit II, "Codilla Farm" (Bachelor of Science thesis in Agricultural Business (Business Management. Baybay, Leyte: Visayas State College of Agriculture, 1984).

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 6-11. A farm administrator, in this case Claro Arguilles who started out as personal driver to the Codillas, supervised the three *capatazes* and reported to the farm manager, Eduardo Codilla. A *capataz*, on the other hand, supervised the laborers assigned under him/her and reported to the farm administrator. The harvested sugarcane was milled at the nearby Hilongos Development Corporation (HIDECO), which was only five (5) km away. In 1984, the Codilla plantation was not yet mechanized, but used carabaos instead. In the fiscal year ending December 1980, it incurred a loss of 13,862.54 pesos, but enjoyed a profit of 5,667.00 pesos in 1981 and 8,214.67 pesos in 1982. The sharing basis between the Codilla plantation and the HIDECO sugar central was on a 65-35 percent basis, with 65 percent of the sugar and molasses produced going to the owner and the 35 percent to the sugar central.

<sup>378</sup> F. Gabor and E. Mantua, "Production management practices in Eric Codilla Piggery Farm," (Bachelor of Science thesis in Animal Science (Animal Production Major). Baybay, Leyte: Visayas State College of Agriculture, 1992).

therefore, the November 1991 tragedy created the perfect opportunity for the family to transition into the political sphere, with Dodong Codilla's backhoes and construction trucks becoming the instruments of a family's enduring political clout. However, it would be their close links to timber that would come to haunt them again and again in post-November 1991 Ormoc.<sup>379</sup> Ramon Larrazabal, mayor of the municipality of San Isidro in Leyte, even went as far as accusing Dodong Codilla as being among the illegal loggers in Ormoc, an allegation denied by another son, Eufrocino "Wennie" Codilla, who stressed that the family's logging business was legal and "duly accredited" by the DENR.<sup>380</sup>

### Illegal logging

Surprisingly, given the highly political nature of illegal logging and extensive media coverage, there is no universal definition of what it is.<sup>381</sup> In the Philippines, the basic provision of law on illegal logging prior to 1991 was section 68 of Presidential Decree No. 705, otherwise known as the Forestry Reform Code. Here, the crime of illegal logging was committed when "[a]ny person...cut[s], gather[s], collect[s], remove[s] timber or other forest products from any forest land, or timber from alienable or disposable public land, or from private land without any authority, or possess timber or other forest products without the legal documents as required under existing forest laws and regulations."<sup>382</sup> Historically, illegal logging had been difficult to document or measure. In a study on illegal logging in the northern Sierra Madre Natural Park in Luzon, the biggest island of the Philippines, based on field observations and informal interviews from 1992 to 2008, it was found to be undertaken, not as small-scale livelihood activities by rural poor farmers, but

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<sup>379</sup> See, for example, E. Justimbaste, "NBI accuses Ormoc mayor of forging logging papers," *Philippine News and Features* 10:28, 8 January 1994, 12; and, E. Justimbaste, "Ormoc mayor's son hiding more hot lumber?" *Philippine News and Features* 12:70, 15 June 1996, 13.

<sup>380</sup> C. Pablo and R. Puaben, "Factoran spurns solon on seized narra logs; Isabela's Domingo says shipment is legal," *Malaya*, 19 November 1991, 1&7.

<sup>381</sup> M. Nilsson Rosander, "Illegal Logging, Current issues and opportunities for Sida/SENSE Engagement in Southeast Asia" (Bangkok, Thailand: Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) & Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), 2008), 4 (Online).

<sup>382</sup> This was amended by Executive Order No.277 (1987). Department of Environment and Natural Resources, *Primer on Illegal Logging*. Manila: Legal Affairs Office (Undated), accessed 17 February 2014, 4 (Online).

comparable to commercial scale activities.<sup>383</sup> Middlemen and financiers, who spearheaded these activities, commonly paid bribes fixed at one peso per board feet to DENR officials in Isabela, another peso per board feet to the insurgent National People's Army (NPA) contingent in the area, and 1,500 pesos (or \$30) per truck to pass through at least eleven checkpoints set up by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) along the national highway from Isabela to central Luzon.<sup>384</sup>

The discourse on illegal logging in Leyte also invariably involved politicians and the police. Representative Manuel Horca, Jr. of the second district of Leyte<sup>385</sup> for the Eighth Congress (1987-1992) had been identified as "one of the major illegal loggers in Leyte," who openly conspired with corrupt DENR officials and "syndicates" in logging.<sup>386</sup> Also implicated in the allegations were DENR regional technical director in Eastern Visayas for forestry, Vicente Paragas; DENR deputy and chief of forest resource conservation, Christopher Kuizon; Elpidio Simon; Danilo Javier; Robin Tumolva; and Rizalido Casco, all technical assistants; and lawyer Antonio Oliva of the legal department. Paragas, Kuizon and Simon all denied involvement in the alleged syndicate.<sup>387</sup> Two top police constabulary officials

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<sup>383</sup> Van der Ploeg et al, "Illegal logging in the Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park The Philippines."

<sup>384</sup> Cited in Van der Ploeg, Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> The second district of Leyte includes the municipalities of Barugo, Burauen, Capoocan, Carigara, Dagami, Dulag, Jaro, Julita, La Paz, MacArthur, Mayorga, Pastrana, Tabontabon, and Tunga. On the other hand, Ormoc is part of the fourth district of Leyte, together with Albuera, Kananga, Merida, Palompon and Isabel.

<sup>386</sup> According to Thompson, Horca was fired from his position as an engineer for forgery in the late 1970s, but later appointed as provincial engineer in Leyte. In 1987, he ran under the banner of the *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* and won the congressional seat for the second district of Leyte after receiving monetary funding from his brother-in-law, Pedro Go Porciuncula, one of the biggest gambling lords in Metro Manila as well as an illegal logger himself. H. Thompson, "The economic, political and biological degradation of the Philippines," Working Paper No. 184, *Journal of Economic Literature* (Australia: Murdoch University, School of Economics, 2001) (Online). Also see, N. Abrimatea, "Two suspected illegal loggers charged," *Philippine Star*, 30 November 1991, 6; and, D. Petilla, "Leyte solon, gambling lord in illegal logging," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 3 December 1991, 1&9.

<sup>387</sup> It should be noted here that illegal logging is a highly political issue, with real dangers to those who expose its activities. Danny Petilla, who was then a 28-year old multi-awarded journalist for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in 1991, wrote a series of investigative news articles on illegal logging in Leyte in the aftermath of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy. After publishing these articles, he "fled the Philippines in December 1991 to escape death threats and harassment from criminals and politicians alike." Settling down in the United States with his family, he only came back to the Philippines after the devastation of Super typhoon Haiyan in November 2013. See D. Petilla, "DENR logging ring unmasked," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 6 December 1991, 1&12; D. Petilla, "Reporter gets death threats for expose,"

in Eastern Visayas were also tagged as coddlers of illegal loggers in Leyte and Samar. Identified were Police General Vicente S. Garcia, Jr., superintendent for Eastern Visayas, and Colonel Reynaldo Acop, director for Leyte.<sup>388</sup> Both Garcia and Horca before him insisted that these allegations were “politically motivated.”<sup>389</sup> Retired Brigadier General Lorenzo Mateo of Urdaneta, Pangasinan, and Philippine National Police (PNP) Colonel Wilfredo Reotutar were also identified for their past involvements in illegal logging in Leyte.<sup>390</sup>

In Ormoc, forested areas susceptible to illegal logging could be found only in the top reaches of the watershed. These areas occupied about 150 hectares within the geothermal reservation of the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC), or about 3.33 per cent of the entire Ormoc watershed area.<sup>391</sup> The remaining 96.66 per cent of the watershed was classified as alienable and disposable, utilized primarily for the cultivation of sugarcane, coconut and rice. Agricultural areas reached as far as 600 meters elevation, with sugarcane and coconut plantations cultivated in areas with slopes ranging beyond eight (8) per cent.

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*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 December 1991, 1&11; D. Petilla, “‘Yolanda’ disaster calls native son home,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 28 November 2013 (Online). The same threats to life had been experienced by another multi-awarded investigative journalist, Marites Vitug, especially after the publication of her book *The Politics of Logging, Power from the Forest* (1993).

<sup>388</sup> In relation to illegal logging in Ormoc, the Larrazabal clan had accused General Garcia of coddling big-time illegal loggers in Leyte, including Eufrocino Codilla Sr. Garcia was godfather to Codilla’s son, Eufrocino Jr., who was then councillor in Ormoc. On the other hand, documents from a joint environmental management group of the DENR and the PNOC showed that Colonel Acop had intervened several times in favour of the release of ‘hot’ lumber to Filipino-Chinese businessmen in Tacloban and Ormoc. Acop allegedly personally wrote to Inspector Elmer Madriaga, PNP Police Chief in Kananga on 30 September 1991, to release a truck owned by Charlie Uy Kim, a businessman from Tacloban City. The truck in question was seized by PNP and DENR operatives on September 28, 1991, for the transportation of illegal logs in Kananga. In addition to this incident, Acop allegedly also interceded for the release of two truckloads of hot logs owned by Codilla on 16 September 1991 in Capoocan, Leyte. See D. Petilla, “2 top Visayas cops coddling illegal loggers,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 4 December 1991, 1&8.

<sup>389</sup> D. Petilla, “Leyte solon, gambling lord in illegal logging,” *Ibid.*; and, D. Petilla, “2 top Visayas cops coddling illegal loggers,” *Ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> D. Petilla, “Reporter gets death threats for expose,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 December 1991, 1&11.

<sup>391</sup> LC Map No. 2510, FAO 4-1028 dated 16 February 1962, in “Assessment of the causes of the flooding of Ormoc City, Leyte Island, Philippines,” Consolidated technical findings of Forest Management, Mines and Geosciences, Environmental Management and Protected Areas, Lands Management, and Ecosystems Research and Development, DENR Region VIII (Eastern Visayas: Undated), 1.

**Table 3.2****Land Use/Vegetation by Slope Ranges, Ormoc City**

<b>Slope Ranges (%)</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>	<b>Per cent (%)</b>	<b>Dominant Land Use/Vegetation</b>
0-3	15,593	34	Mainly for agricultural use (sugarcane, coconut and rice), built-up
3-8	4,142	9	
8-18	8,626	19	
18-30	8,485	18	Open grassland, shrubland
30-50	8,027	17	Woodland/shrubland
>50	1,557	3	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46,430</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Land Resources Evaluation Project (LREP), Leyte Province, BSWM (1986), cited in Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group,<sup>392</sup> "Ormoc assessment report".

Within the Ormoc watershed itself, cadastral and survey records in 1991 showed that there were more than 700 lot claimants, who were predominantly big landholders rather than small lot owners. The Laurente family, who originated from Sitio Cabaon-an, also in Ormoc, was the first to settle at Sitio Bagtic (renamed Camp Site) in 1920.<sup>393</sup> The Alao, Taneo and Bañez families followed in 1953, and other families such as the Ronquese, Quilasadio, Betose, Hermoso, Cabalejo, and Jose also set up settlements in the following years.<sup>394</sup> Of the total 25,945 square meters watershed surveyed by the DENR in 1991, the following families owned at least one per cent landholding: Aparis (1.1 per cent); Baclayon (1.8 per cent); Bañez (1.7 per cent); Daffon (3 per cent); Espina (1.3 per cent); Hermoso (1.7 per cent); Orillano (1.1 per cent); Pongos (3.1 per cent); Puray (1.1 per cent); Teves (1.7 per cent); Torrevillas (2.0 per cent); and Villa (2.4 per cent). The major landholders in the Ormoc watershed, as discussed in **Chapter 2**, included the Larrazabals (15.9 per cent); Seraficas (9.9 per cent); Suans (7.5 per

<sup>392</sup> The Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group was organized by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in the immediate aftermath of the November 1991 Ormoc tragedy, with Undersecretary Ricardo Gloria as chair. Members of the study group included representatives from the DOST Region VIII; the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) and Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) Region VIII, agencies under the supervision of the DOST; University of the Philippines College of Forestry in Los Baños; University of the Philippine Diliman; Visayas State College of Agriculture (VISCA); and the Department of Public Works and Highways Region VIII.

<sup>393</sup> Local Government of Barangay Tongonan Ormoc City website, Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

cent); Sumalings (5.7 per cent); Tans (5.2 per cent); and the Torreses (6.6 per cent).

The creation of the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) in 1973, enacted through Presidential Decree No. 334 to “promote industrial and over-all economic development through the effective and efficient utilization of energy sources, including oil and oil-based resources,”<sup>395</sup> further opened the forest reserve in Ormoc City to human settlement and natural resource exploitation. Notably, the PNOC commissioned the three-megawatt geothermal power plant in Barangay Tongonan by 1977.<sup>396</sup> The geothermal reservation area itself had a total of 107,625 hectares, straddling Ormoc City and the municipality of Kananga. By 1987, a nine-kilometer concrete road was constructed from Barangay Milagro to Sitio Welcome in Barangay Tongonan. In 1991, PNOC had a forest cover of thirty-six (36) per cent, higher than the national average of twenty-five (25) per cent, and certainly better than the fifty (50) per cent decrease in forest cover experienced by Leyte province in the previous eighteen years mainly due to illegal logging.<sup>397</sup> Legally, in 1991, the area within the geothermal reservation in Barangay Tongonan, formerly under the jurisdiction of the Philippine National Oil Corporation (PNOC)—which was later privatized in 2007 when the Lopez group of companies bought and renamed it the Energy Development Corporation (EDC)—totalled 1,516 hectares. Of these, 1,366 hectares were classified as alienable or disposable and 150 hectares as forestland located within headwaters or creeks. The area outside the geothermal reservation, or 3,135 hectares in total, was classified alienable and disposable primarily for agricultural use as early as 1962.<sup>398</sup> The watershed is situated within the barangays of Patag, Donghol, Biliboy, Bagong, Dolores, Mahayag and

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<sup>395</sup> Presidential Decree 334, otherwise known as the “Charter of the Philippine National Oil Company,” sec. 2.

<sup>396</sup> Philippine National Oil Corporation (PNOC). “Milestones.” Copyright 2007, accessed 18 February 2014 (Online). According to Agnes de Jesus, PNOC spokesperson in November 1991, and reiterated by DENR Secretary Factoran in subsequent interviews, the Ormoc reservation was turned over to PNOC in 1984. See C. Pablo, “Illegal logging caused floods,” *Malaya*, 8 November 1991, 1&3.

<sup>397</sup> C. Pablo, “Illegal logging caused floods,” *Ibid.*, 1&3; “DENR rules out deforestation as main cause of flashflood,” *Philippine Times Journal*, 11 November 1991, 16; and, A.M. Pamintuan and F. Verga, “Cory orders probe of illegal logging; Factoran says 4 Leyte Mayors involved,” *Philippine Star*, 12 November 1991, 1&5.

<sup>398</sup> Implemented by virtue of the LC Map No. 2501 FAO 4-1028.

Milagro. The PNOC, however, was far from a popular public institution. It is notable that in the immediate aftermath of the November 1991 tragedy, negative public perception centered on the PNOC's ability to protect the reservation area given its limited manpower. This perception was further complicated by public distrust of its development agenda, particularly energy generation dependent on the exploitation of natural resources.<sup>399</sup> As a result, the PNOC had to issue a statement in the aftermath of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy re-affirming its commitment to protect and preserve the forest within its jurisdiction, while ensuring a reliable supply of geothermal energy.<sup>400</sup>

Yet to what extent was illegal logging a prevalent practice in the reservation area? In 1987, the PNOC filed an illegal logging case against a Colonel Romeo Arsenio, when timber from the municipality of Albura was found in his fishing boat.<sup>401</sup> While this case was eventually dismissed, another case was pursued by the Department of National Defense (DND) against Arsenio for alleged illegal cutting of rattan palms.<sup>402</sup> According to Agnes de Jesus in November 1991, chief of the PNOC environmental management division, illegal loggers blatantly operated in the reservation area managed by the PNOC.<sup>403</sup> Since the PNOC began operations in Leyte in 1988, it had undertaken 236 confiscations of illegally cut timber from the area, but only forty-four (44) cases had been filed resulting in convictions while the rest were dismissed.<sup>404</sup> Nationwide, 755 cases were pending in

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<sup>399</sup> Leyte Vice Governor Aurelio Menzon wanted to file a case against PNOC to force it to stop drilling in Mount Alto Peak, which according to him was affecting the operations of the Leyte Metropolitan Water District. DENR Provincial head Edgardo Galeon accused the PNOC of not heading his call to stop operations within the Binahaan Catchment. Regional Director Victor Domingo of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said he will support a class suit against PNOC for dumping chemical wastes into the river. See "Leyte officials threatening to sue state-owned PNOC," *Philippine Star*, 18 November 1991, 1&2.

<sup>400</sup> "PNOC denies charges of Leyte officials," *Philippine Star*, 20 November 1991, 1&9.

<sup>401</sup> F. Verga and R. Reyes, "68 top DENR men in illegal logging; only 39 convictions in 755 cases noted," *Philippine Star*, 15 November 1991, 1&6.

<sup>402</sup> Cited in Verga and Reyes, *Ibid*.

<sup>403</sup> "Leyte forests ravaged, gov't exec confirms," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 December 1991, 1&10.

<sup>404</sup> The DENR regional executive director at that time, Rosalio Goze, however, denies de Jesus' testimony during a probe of the committee on environment and natural resources at the House of Representatives that there was massive illegal logging in Leyte. *Ibid*.

courts for illegal logging, but there were only thirty-nine (39) convictions while seventy-nine (79) were acquitted.<sup>405</sup>

The problem of successfully prosecuting illegal loggers points to the glaring weakness of law enforcement in forest protection. Most cases filed against timber poachers and illegal loggers were commonly dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence, problems due to technicalities, or because those charged were able to influence corrupt government officials to drop the cases filed against them.<sup>406</sup> In a separate inquiry by the Philippine National Police (PNP) led by Deputy Director General Manuel Roxas, both General Garcia and Colonel Acop were cleared of any involvement in illegal logging activities, despite the observation raised by the environmental group, SOS Earth, of the probe's apparent haste in closing the cases.<sup>407</sup> Indeed, the refusal of the military in 1991 to even acknowledge some of its members' complicity in illegal logging, despite evidence,<sup>408</sup> indicates the complexity of apprehending and prosecuting violators.<sup>409</sup>

Violations against Section 68 of Presidential Decree No. 705 or the Forestry Reform Code of the Philippines were governed in 1991 by Articles 309 and 310 of the Revised Penal Code, which equate illegal logging with theft.<sup>410</sup> As such, the punishment for the crime of illegal logging as theft

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<sup>405</sup> F. Verga, "DENR officials call for imposition of death penalty on illegal loggers," *Philippine Star*, 16 November 1991, 1&9.

<sup>406</sup> O. Embido, "Forest law enforcement and investigation techniques in the Philippines," in *Summary Report of the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance East Asia Ministerial Conference*, 11-13 September 2001, written and ed. L. Ivers and L. Mead. International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Copyright 1992-2016 (Online).

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> See, for example, M. Vitug, Chapter 3, "Soldiers in the woods," in *The Politics of Logging, Power from the Forest* (1993), which traces the connivance of numerous military officials in deforestation activities as early as the 1970s in northern Mindanao and in the mid-1980s in other parts of the country.

<sup>409</sup> General Lisandro Abadia, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff, stated that allegations pertaining to military officials' involvement in illegal logging "have been put to rest." See F. Verga, "DENR to name mayor, others in illegal logging; solon seeks release of seized P9-m narra," *Philippine Star*, 19 November 1991, 1&5.

<sup>410</sup> Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), *Primer on Illegal Logging*, 4-7. The Philippine Revised Penal Code defines theft in Art. 308 as an act "committed by any person who, with intent to gain but without violence against or intimidation of persons nor force upon things, shall take personal property of another without the latter's consent." Theft is also the finding of lost property but failing to deliver it to local authorities or its owner; maliciously damaging the property of another, or removing or making use of the fruits or object that the damage caused; and trespassing a property of another person without the consent of the owner to hunt, fish or gather cereals or other forest or farm products.



imposed imprisonment not exceeding twenty years, depending on the value of the timber that was stolen. The common penalty for conviction of illegal logging was a maximum sentence of six years imprisonment and a fine of not more than 6,000 pesos. In most cases, convictions resulted in sentences of only one-month imprisonment and a 200-peso fine.<sup>411</sup> However, consideration in the law was made for the offender's extenuating circumstances, particularly if theft was proven as caused by "hunger, poverty, or the difficulty of earning a livelihood for the support of himself or his family."<sup>412</sup> Illegal logging was deemed to have been committed if a person is found to possess timber or other forest products without legal documents. Thus, the onus of proof was with the DENR, which issued the appropriate licenses. This conundrum was succinctly stated by acting Secretary of the Department of Justice (DOJ), Silvestre Bello III, in the great flood of November 1991 in relation to the identification of at least 3,000 illegal logging cases pending at that time in the courts and prosecutors' offices nationwide: "We cannot engage in fact finding," he said, "We have to wait for the complaints to be forwarded to us."<sup>413</sup> After the November 1991 tragedy, DENR Secretary Factoran linked two environment regional officials and 66 personnel to illegal logging. Most of the cases involved conniving with illegal loggers, receiving bribes, allowing illegal logging of trees, releasing logs without licenses, illegally issuing certificates for non-existent logs, extortion and issuing permits on illegally sourced logs.<sup>414</sup> The DENR's vulnerability to both corruption and harassment indicate the systemic weakness in forest protection.<sup>415</sup> In a report released to the media in November 1991, the DENR stated that there were 147 cases of harassment against its officials and personnel by illegal loggers themselves, political leaders and military

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<sup>411</sup> R. Villadiego, "Factoran bares list of DENR men linked to illegal logging," 1&12.

<sup>412</sup> *Revised Penal Code*, Art.309, No. 8. A more specific law was promulgated in 2002 to address the problem of illegal logging through Republic Act No. 9175, "An Act Regulating the Ownership, Possession, Sale, Importation and Use of Chainsaws, Penalizing Violations thereof and for Other Purposes."

<sup>413</sup> F. Verga and R. Reyes, "68 top DENR men in illegal logging: Only 39 convictions in 755 cases noted," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 November 1991, 1&6.

<sup>414</sup> R. Villadiego, "Factoran bares list of DENR men linked to illegal logging."

<sup>415</sup> See P. Utting (ed.), *Forest Policy and Politics in the Philippines, The Dynamics of Participatory Conservation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University and the United Research Institute for Social Development, 2000), especially M. Vitug, "Forest policy and national politics," 11-39; and, B. Malayang III, "The changing role of government in forest protection," 40-66.

officials.<sup>416</sup> Secretary Factoran further pointed out that in addition to harassments and threats to life rendering DENR personnel virtually useless in protecting forests, the agency itself was incapable of sending “big fish” to jail because of the lack of witnesses willing to testify in court, lack of evidence admissible in court, and lack of legal assistance and logistics, in some cases.<sup>417</sup> The Department of Justice (DOJ) sent a team on 15 November 1991 to conduct an inventory of illegal logging cases pending with the prosecutor’s office and the courts in Ormoc, and discovered that the records of illegal logging cases filed there prior to 1988 could not be found.<sup>418</sup> Only nine cases of illegal logging were found filed in Leyte, with five each in Tacloban City and Ormoc.<sup>419</sup>

Illegal logging had accelerated the disaster that occurred on 5 November 1991. But legal logging was as much, indeed more so, to blame for deforestation in Ormoc prior to 1991. As this chapter has shown, the occurrence of environmental changes to forests on Leyte that had occurred nearly over a century prior to 1991—namely illegal logging perpetrated by timber poachers and illegal loggers in collusion with corrupt government officials, police and military personnel, and legal logging sanctioned under numerous government policies and programs—not only led to the catastrophe of the November 1991 flash flood. It also highlighted the fragility of national institutions notably the DENR, mandated not only to protect the environment, but also to control private interests especially personal greed.

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<sup>416</sup> “Factoran blames military, politicians for bald forests,” *Philippine Times Journal*, 21 November 1992, 15.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid. The term “big fish” is commonly used in Philippine media to refer to wealthy financiers and corrupt politicians and bureaucrats who finance or protect illegal operations.

<sup>418</sup> Justice Undersecretary Alejandro Urro, in a report to DOJ Secretary Silvestre Bello III, said, “No record of cases filed prior to 1988 could be found.” See P. Arias, “Death penalty proposed for illegal loggers,” *Manila Bulletin*, 16 November 1991, 1&24.

<sup>419</sup> Cited in the DOJ report in F. Verga, “DENR officials call for imposition of death penalty on illegal loggers,” *Philippine Star*, 16 November 1991, 1&9.

## TYPHOON, FLASH FLOOD AND DISASTER

*...when we went upstairs, I said, it is like the story of the Ark of Noah. It was like that. There was nothing. I was really trembling. Then I cried. Our prayer was that nothing, nothing [Victor Arcuiño: Comes after] yes! If nothing came after we will be okay. It was the end of the world! We cried, my husband and I.*<sup>420</sup>

- Apining, Interview with author, 6 April 2013 in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya

*So afterwards the water subsided and the river went back to normal. It was like only thirty minutes. Everything was lined up. The place was really like a piece of hell. There were no more trees, everything was dead, animals, people, everything. In the streets everything was dead. In the sea, the dead were floating. Things were scattered all about the city. So the only thing that remained with me was my underwear. I was only in my underwear though the back was torn because there was a child who wanted to grab hold of me.*<sup>421</sup>

- Buboy, Interview with author, 4 April 2013 in Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English

In the morning of 5 November 1991, a “relatively small and weak storm system”<sup>422</sup> resulted in the worst flooding in the Philippines in seven years. Municipalities along the foot of the Alto peak mountain ranges, where residual forests<sup>423</sup> could be found, were utterly devastated. The death toll, second only to the massive destruction wrought by the Moro Gulf earthquake and tsunami near the islands of Mindanao and Sulu in 1976,<sup>424</sup> was so extraordinary that in Ormoc City alone, at least 4,000 people were estimated to have been killed outright, with thousands more injured and reported

<sup>420</sup> Apining, interview with author, 6 April 2013 in Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author. Victor Arcuino, the author’s interpreter, was present during this interview.

<sup>421</sup> Buboy, interview with author, April 4, 2013 in Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>422</sup> M. Pearson and J. Oliver, *Reconnaissance Report: Flooding resulting from Typhoon Uring in Ormoc City, Leyte Province, the Philippines*, Miscellaneous Paper GL-92-12 (Washington D.C.: US Army Corps of Engineers 1992), 12.

<sup>423</sup> A residual forest is defined as “The status or condition of a forest subsequent to commercial logging and which there is more or less sufficient or adequate volume of residuals or the desired species of trees of future harvest.” It is differentiated from a natural forest, which is defined as “Forest composed of indigenous trees, not planted by man.” Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), “Philippine official reference for forest-related terms and definitions.” Manila, Bureau of Forestry (Undated), accessed 3 March 2014 (Online).

<sup>424</sup> See V. Badillo, “The Moro Gulf Tidal Wave of 17 August 1976,” in *Philippine Studies* Vol. 26 No. 4 (Ateneo de Manila University, Fourth Quarter 1978), 426-436.

missing. Politically and economically, the 1991 Ormoc tragedy could not have come at a worse time. More perplexing was that although Typhoon Uring affected a number of municipalities not only in Leyte but in other parts of the Visayas as well, why was it only in Ormoc that a catastrophe of biblical proportions occurred? If Typhoon Uring was a weak weather disturbance, why did it trigger such a deadly flood? This chapter looks at the social anatomy of the Ormoc disaster in 1991. It also explores the competing discourses that emerged in its aftermath, with the objective of understanding how the disaster was experienced by particular communities and individuals.

### **Weather and Climate of Ormoc**

Several theories had been forwarded to explain the heavy rainfall on 5 November and its extraordinary effect in terms of a deadly flood. One, the “orographic effect” hypothesized that when Typhoon Uring came in contact with the mountains of Samar and Leyte, it rose to a higher altitude thereby cooling and condensing huge quantities of water vapor which then formed into cumulonimbus capillatus rain clouds. Second, because Uring was a slow moving typhoon with a speed of only about eleven (11) kilometers per hour (kph), its rains were concentrated over the Leyte mountain range, including the Ormoc watershed as well as the eastern towns of Jaro, Burauen, Dagami and Pastrana, which all have watersheds in the same area and were similarly flooded. Third, the *habagat* or the monsoon blew against Uring resulting in a convergence that could have occurred in the mountain ranges around Alto Peak. Ormoc victim-survivors insist on hearing explosions just before the deluge, which many believed to be thunder (with superstitions saying that thunder signified the end of rain), but may have been several *buhawi*<sup>425</sup> (with some respondents stating as many as a thousand occurring that morning) or waterspouts. Another common theory, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the flood, was the failure of Lake Danao in the watershed area, which breached its banks and flooded the city.

Leyte is situated in an area highly conducive not only to the genesis, but most importantly the path of tropical cyclones, which can occur during

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<sup>425</sup> Filipino, lit. water spouts.

almost any month. It is relevant here to note briefly the findings from a study of tropical cyclones that hit the Philippine islands during a 45-year period from 1945-1989,<sup>426</sup> as a starting point in understanding the extraordinary development of Typhoon Uring in Ormoc City in November 1991. First, the Philippines commonly experiences tropical cyclones between September and November, with a peak in November. Second and more importantly, the nature of tropical cyclones crossing the Philippines tend to weaken, but those with intensity of less than fifty (50) knots (*kt* or 92.60 kph) at landfall do not weaken significantly. As such, the amount of weakening is proportional to intensity, although weakening is less for those passing south of 14.5°. Third, tropical cyclones moving faster than fifteen (15) knots (or about 28 kph) tend to slow down after making landfall, while those moving 15 knots or less have little velocity change. Fourth, tropical cyclones moving south or west tend to curve more westward after landfall, but those moving west-northwestward show little change of direction. Fifth, the average time over land is twenty hours south of 14.5° N, but only eleven hours north of 14.5° N due to the narrow E-W dimension of Luzon. Sixth, the average intensity at landfall for cyclones hitting the Philippines, or “just before landfall,” is 66.9 knots (or 123.89 kph). Thus, even those tropical cyclones that miss the Philippines are still significant because preparations must still be made and therefore these cyclones must still be closely monitored. Finally, tropical depressions (25-30 knots or 46-56 kph) do not have wind threat, but can still cause heavy rainfall. Tropical storms (35-62 knots or 65-115 kph), both those categorized as weak (35-45 knots or 65-83 kph) and strong ( $\geq 50$ -60 knots or  $\geq 93$ -111 kph), may weaken but weak ones generally do not weaken significantly compared with strong storms. The more intense the typhoon, the more its intensity can decrease while passing through the islands.

During ‘normal’ times, it has been noted that only winds from the south-southeast to the south-southwest blow directly against Ormoc. Indeed,

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<sup>426</sup> However, the lack of satellite coverage of the earlier portion of the record resulted in the identification of fewer weak tropical cyclones, thereby lowering the number of tropical cyclones that hit the Philippines by more than one per year (or 20 percent). Thus, the focus of the study in the climatology section was only on a twenty-year period from 1970 to 1989. See F. Williams, G. Jung and R. Engelbretson, *Forecasters Handbook for the Philippine Islands and Surrounding Waters* (Monterey, California: Naval Research Laboratory, December 1993) (Online).

based on thousands of wind direction observations,<sup>427</sup> winds that affect Ormoc hardly ever follow a southwest to northwest direction. In addition, northeasterly winds blow mainly from December to April, while from May to November the winds blow mostly from south-southwest. Humidity decreases from December to March because north-easterly winds would deposit their moisture while passing over Samar and the mountains of Leyte before reaching Ormoc. Additionally, May to November winds are southerly moist. Relative humidity from April to December is on an increase, with temperature from May to September constantly high and rainfall and cloudiness heaviest from July to September.

Nonetheless, while typhoons appear to bring mostly negative consequences, its positive consequences are part and parcel of Philippine life. They influence temperature, air moisture, rainfall, and wind direction and force, which especially for weak typhoons are boons to agriculture. In Ormoc specifically, because it is buffeted by mountain ranges to the east, the city enjoys a relatively balanced weather and climate. It has been noted, for instance, that from 1902 to 1929 there was not one day in any month without rain, and of the severe drought of 1914 to 1915 that harshly afflicted Candon in western Luzon bringing no rain for 122 days, it appeared in a much milder form in Ormoc lasting only twenty-nine (29) days.<sup>428</sup>

The Janus face of typhoons as both a beneficial and destructive force has been constant realities in the lives of Filipinos. Coronas (1920) puts it pithily when he says:

That typhoons have a great influence on the climate and the weather in the Philippines cannot be reasonably doubted. Our rainfall in summer and autumn, many of our prevailing winds, particularly in summer, the great wind velocity of several months for a good number of our stations, etc. etc., are to be attributed to the influence of typhoons. Most of the greatest changes of weather experienced in our Archipelago as to precipitation, humidity, cloudiness, and winds, are

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<sup>427</sup> Manila Observatory, "Climate Profile of Borongan, Guiuan, Tacloban and Ormoc," Unpublished paper (Ateneo de Manila University Rizal Library, Undated).

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

caused only by typhoons. Hence the importance of this matter in any writing on the weather and climate of the Philippines.<sup>429</sup>

To the extent that Typhoon Uring had been a 'normal' occurrence on 5 November 1991 may have influenced the ordinary Ormocanon to disregard typhoon-warning signals and assume higher risks until it was too late, and more disturbingly to understand the seeming absence of social discourse beyond the labelling of the 1991 tragedy as *kalit* (or sudden).

### **The unremarkable typhoon**

In Guam, the Joint Typhoon Warning Center (JTWC) first sighted a tropical disturbance in the eastern Caroline Islands on 27 October 1991 that was following a west-northwest direction.<sup>430</sup> It persisted for four days, after which the JTWC, following its protocols, issued a Tropical Cyclone Formation Alert four days after sighting, on 31 October, becoming the twenty-seventh tropical cyclone of the western North Pacific for 1991.<sup>431</sup> The alert was upgraded to a Tropical Depression Warning on 1 November following a satellite-derived intensity report of twenty-five (25) knots or forty-six (46) kph.<sup>432</sup>

At the same time, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) began tracking the system as a tropical depression situated roughly 415 kilometers north-northeast of Palau.<sup>433</sup> JMA would later call it Typhoon No. 25.<sup>434</sup> Initial forecasts showed the system heading west on a path arcing out to sea. If it had followed that track, it would have completely missed the Philippines. But in the early morning of 2 November, it shifted course and headed straight for the Philippines, carrying maximum sustained winds of fifty-five (55) kph. As a

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<sup>429</sup> J. Coronas, *The Climate and Weather of the Philippines, 1903 to 1918* (Manila: Bureau of Printing 1920), 165.

<sup>430</sup> D. Rudolph and C. Guard, *1991 Annual Tropical Cyclone Report* (Guam, Marianas Islands: Joint Typhoon Warning Center, Undated), 132.

<sup>431</sup> F. Williams, G. Jung and R. Englebreton, *Forecasters Handbook for the Philippine Islands and Surrounding Waters*, 3-26.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Kitamoto Asanobu, "Digital typhoon: Typhoon 199125 (Thelma)" (Japan: Research Organization of Information and Systems (ROIS)/National Institute of Informatics (NII), Undated), accessed 18 December 2013 (Online).

<sup>434</sup> S. Herath, "Floods in Ormoc City, Leyte on November 5, 1991," in *Seisan-Kenkyu Journal of Institute of Industrial Science* Vol. 45 No. 3 (University of Tokyo, 1993), 193 (Online).

result, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), the country's weather bureau, began to track it. The tropical depression was assigned the local name 'Uring' as soon as it entered the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR), the seventeenth tropical cyclone for 1991. Uring appeared to be an 'ordinary' typhoon.

Up until two p.m. of 2 November, Uring had followed a northwest direction, where typhoons typically pass upon entry into the Philippine islands.<sup>435</sup> But by the afternoon of 3 November, Uring changed trajectory to follow a west-southwest path towards the island of Samar.<sup>436</sup> It was first classified as a tropical storm, but quickly dropped to fifty-five (55) kph on 5 November, corresponding to a tropical depression.<sup>437</sup> On that day, Uring made landfall in eastern Samar. Storm signal number two was raised over Samar, Leyte, Masbate and Sorsogon at four in the morning of 5 November. But it was lowered to Signal Number 1 by 11:00 a.m. of the same day.<sup>438</sup> Opposite the track followed by Uring, a separate wind system—the monsoon or *habagat*—was also believed to be brewing in the atmosphere over eastern Visayas, possibly converging over the mountain ranges of Alto Peak.<sup>439</sup> Experts call this phenomenon the "orographic lift," whereby as air masses move further upward, water vapor cools and condenses, resulting in more rain.<sup>440</sup> The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-Region VIII believed that there was the "presence of heavy rain in funnel form due to [the] whirling pattern of air movement."<sup>441</sup> As Uring slowly advanced over Tacloban City, intense rain started at about 7:30 a.m. of 5

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<sup>435</sup> Environmental Research Division, Manila Observatory, *The Ormoc City Tragedy of November 5, 1991: An Evaluation of the Different Contributing Factors*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Environmental Science for Social Change, October 1992), 10 (Online). For an early discussion on the general conditions of the Philippine climate and exceptional conditions from 1903-1918, see J. Coronas, *The Climate and Weather of the Philippines, 1903 to 1918*.

<sup>436</sup> This recurvature was thought to have been induced by a push from a cold front coming from the north, characteristic of some typhoons occurring late in the year. Indeed, the JTWC contends in a report that initial track forecasts mistakenly predicted Uring's (Thelma's) recurvature into the westerlies. See D. Rudolph and C. Guard, *1991 Annual Tropical Cyclone Report*, 133.

<sup>437</sup> A tropical storm is defined as a moderate tropical cyclone with maximum wind speed of 64 to 118 kph and with closed isobars. A tropical depression, on the other hand, is a weak low pressure disturbance with a definite surface circulation and wind speed of up to 63 kph.

<sup>438</sup> Environmental Research Division, *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>441</sup> DENR-Region VIII, "Investigation report of the Ormoc City disaster," 12.



November.<sup>442</sup> Rainfall recorded in the PAGASA gauging station in Tacloban showed discharge of 140.2 millimeters (mm) in a 24-hour period, with the most intense rainfall occurring between 7:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Intense rainfall in Ormoc began at approximately 9:30 a.m. on 5 November, though it was already steadily raining since the night before.<sup>443</sup> Rainfall recorded from two rain gauges maintained by the Philippine National Oil Corporation (PNOC) in Barangay Tongonan in the uplands of Ormoc showed rainfall measuring 580 mm and 350 mm within a 24-hour period. This record amount of rainfall was way above the normal level for rainfall received in Ormoc in past typhoons. In November 1984, for example, Typhoon Undang registered rainfall at 153 millimeters, while Typhoon Ruping in November 1990 had ninety-eight (98) millimeters, both within a 24-hour period. Again, the average monthly rainfall for November recorded in Valencia, Ormoc City was 143.7 millimeters, which means that on average 7.18 millimeters rainfall would be deposited within twenty-four hours.<sup>444</sup>

**Table 4.1**

**Typhoon Uring Rainfall Records (4-6 November 1991)**

RAIN GAUGE STATION	RAINFALL	PERIOD OF MEASUREMENT
Tacloban PAGASA	140.2 mm	3 hours
Visayas State college of Agriculture (VISCA), Baybay, Leyte	138.8 mm	6 hours – 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. of November 5, 1991
	288.0 mm	8 hours – 3:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.*
PNOC Tongonan Geothermal TG II (near administrative building) Campsite/EDC Hostel (nearer to watershed)	350.0 mm	24 hours – 8 a.m. Nov 4
	580.3 mm	24 hours – 8 a.m. Nov 6

<sup>442</sup> M. Pearson and J. Oliver, *Reconnaissance Report*, 12.

<sup>443</sup> DENR-Region VIII, "Investigation report of the Ormoc City Disaster", 11. According to Jose Rollo, the rain gauge keeper at the PNOC Tongonan, the rain started in Tongonan at 10:00 p.m. of November 4 and became excessive at 8:00 a.m. to about 11:00 a.m. the next day. According to Herath, intermittent heavy rain started at 6:00 a.m. with strong winds. See S. Herath, "Floods in Ormoc City, Leyte on November 5, 1991," 193. These contradict statements made by my respondents that while rains were heavy, winds were not, which contributed to the complacency among residents that it was an ordinary typhoon.

<sup>444</sup> It is interesting to note here, however, that Eller and Asio observed in a paper that Ormoc had no rain gauge in 1991 and thus no precipitation data from 4-5 November 1991. E. Eller and V. Asio, "The flash flood-tragedy of Ormoc: A short analysis from a physio-geographical view."

Isabel, Leyte (PASAR)	233.3 mm	24 hours
Casilda, Merida, Leyte	115.0 mm	24 hours

*Sources:* Special Task Group (STAG) of the Regional Disaster Coordinating Council of Eastern Visayas (Region VIII), "Investigation report of the Ormoc City disaster", 1991; Environmental Research Division, *The Ormoc City Tragedy of November 5, 1991*; and, E. Eller and V. Asio, "The flash flood-tragedy of Ormoc: A short analysis from a physio-geographical view."

Indeed the abnormally strong rain on 5 November prevented Jose Rollo, the rain gauge keeper at PNOC Tongonan, from making any recording on that fateful day. However, he did note that the rain started in Tongonan at ten p.m. on 4 November and became excessive at eight (8) a.m. the next day.

### **The *kalit*<sup>445</sup> flood**

November 5 was an ordinary day. Though not everyone in Ormoc owned radios or knew there was a storm signal announced that day, there was no cause for concern.<sup>446</sup> Ormoc was no stranger to typhoons, receiving at least four annually.<sup>447</sup> As such, most school-age children went to school as usual because classes had not been called off that morning. Employees went to work. The public market was open and busy. Only Saint Peter's College in the downtown area was still closed for the semester break. The Ormoc City High School situated along the Anilao River had classes that day, although teachers had later instructed their students to go home at the height of the rains. The Philippine National Bank (PNB), like other banks downtown, and other local establishments were business as usual. That day, students from Cebu and visitors to the city had come to Ormoc for the semester break, to celebrate All Soul's Day on 1 November, and to do mundane chores in the city.<sup>448</sup> Traffic in the major thoroughfares was for an ordinary weekday morning.

<sup>445</sup> Bisaya, lit. unexpected.

<sup>446</sup> Berto stated it succinctly: "People were complacent because there was no wind, only rain thus, when the explosion (lit. of *pagbuto*) occurred, suddenly there was water that was very turbid mixed with mud." Interview with author, 14 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>447</sup> This statement was made in relation to the entire region VIII, where Ormoc belongs. DENR-Region VIII, "Investigation Report of the Ormoc City Disaster," 12.

<sup>448</sup> Coloy and Councilor Jose Alfaro, simultaneous interviews with author, 19 March 2013, at the Ormoc City Hall, Ormoc City, original in mixed English and Filipino, transcribed by the author. Mr. Alfaro noted that, "According to rough estimates more than 8,000 people died

At the Ormoc watershed in the upland barangays, the massive volume of water brought by Typhoon Uring measuring 580.5 millimeters fell at a rate of 193.5 millimeters per hour.<sup>449</sup> Due to historical land use as a predominantly grassland and agricultural area, the soils in these areas had poor absorption capacity. Thus, rainfall that Tuesday morning, occurring only in three hours, led to a massive build-up of surface run-off, which flowed quickly down the side of cliffs and mountains, and triggering numerous landslips and soil creeps in the upper slopes and steep embankments of the rivers and creeks. An hour after the peak of the intense downpour placed at about eleven a.m., landslips were occurring in the steep slopes of the watershed. According to the Manila Observatory, it was possible to extrapolate from meteorological principles that the higher watershed areas experienced more intense rainfall than those in lower areas.<sup>450</sup> Though travelling at a slow speed of eleven (11) kph, Uring's rain was concentrated over the mountain range that included the Ormoc watershed and the watersheds of eastern towns like Jaro, Burauen, Dagami and Pastrana, all of which had been subsequently flooded.<sup>451</sup> DENR-Regional VIII executive director, Rosalio Goze, believes this was what had happened in Ormoc, where landslides first occurred at the watershed's forest zone before rushing down to the streams, towards the plains where the urban areas of the city were located.<sup>452</sup>

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during the flood, but not all of those people were from Ormoc. There were so many transients. People just passed by, who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time." Coloy added, "There were many students here from Cebu, maybe on break, they went to their friends. They were also included, because that was still during the semestral break [following] November 1 and 2."

<sup>449</sup> DENR-Region VIII, "Assessment of the causes of the flooding of Ormoc City, Leyte Island, Philippines," consolidated technical findings of the five technical services of DENR Region VIII. Eastern Visayas: Forest Management, Mines and Geosciences, Environmental Management and Protected Areas, Lands Management, and Ecosystems Research and Development (1991), 7.

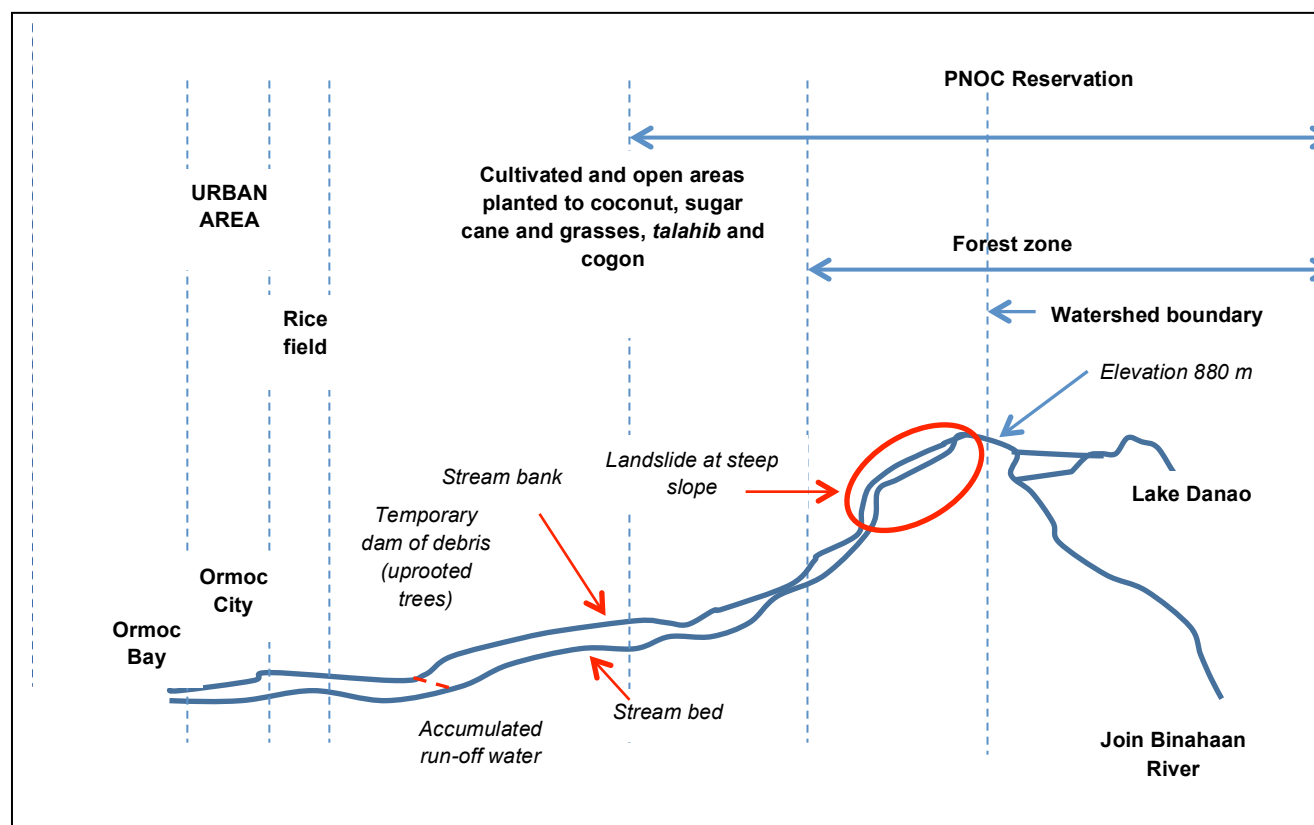
<sup>450</sup> Environmental Research Division, *The Ormoc City Tragedy of November 5, 1991*, 14.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Rosalio Goze (former Regional Executive Director, DENR-Region 8), interview with author, 1 December 2012, in Baguio City in Filipino, translated and transcribed by author.

**Figure 4.1**

**Longitudinal section showing possible causes of flash flooding vis-à-vis watershed profile and land-use**



Source: Based on the illustrations by Rosalio Goze, Regional Executive Director, in DENR-Region VIII (Eastern Leyte), "Assessment on the Ormoc City Flood, November 5, 1991."

The floodwaters carried great amounts of soil and sand, gravel and woody debris, travelling at a velocity of 6.9 to 8.47 meters per second.<sup>453</sup> On normal days, the time required for water to flow from the most distant point of the watershed in Barangay Tongonan to the watershed outlet under 'normal' precipitation rates and with 'good' soil cover was estimated to range from 5.6 days for the Anilao River and 3.6 days for Malbasag River.<sup>454</sup> On 5 November, however, the flow velocity was so fast in fact that floodwaters from the watershed reached Ormoc City within an hour after the peak of the

<sup>453</sup> Normal stream flows in the Upper Malbasag River was 1.136 meter/sec, Lower Malbasag at 0.78 meter/sec, Upper Anilao at 0.65 meter/sec, Middle Anilao at 0.63 meter/sec, and Lower Anilao at 0.57 meter/sec. DENR-Region VIII, "Assessment of the Causes of the Flooding of Ormoc City, Leyte Island, Philippines," 7-8.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

rainfall between 11 a.m. and 12 noon.<sup>455</sup> A prodigious number of trees and coconut trunks were swept downstream at great speeds.<sup>456</sup> As floodwaters hurled past acute natural river bends and man-made constrictions along riverbanks, some of the debris formed temporary dams and massive water impoundments. Small irrigation diversion structures, overflow bridges, and culverts constructed across river channels quickly became clogged. Waterline traces at various points in the channels afterwards showed floodwaters at heights of six to ten meters (or approximately 19 to 32 feet) from the riverbed, indicating where temporary dams and impounding had occurred.<sup>457</sup> Barangay Nalunopan, where Malinawon Creek passed—a tributary of the Anilao River—was estimated to have flooded at a height of more than ten to fifteen feet.<sup>458</sup> Ironically, the sugarcane fields situated on the plateau of the sugarcane plantation in Barangay Nalunopan was not damaged at all, but laborers' houses located in lower elevations were swept away, some with entire families inside. The churning waters then hurtled towards the flood plains of the Anilao and Malbasag rivers. Just before entering the city proper, the Anilao River had an unnatural 90-degree bend. As the voluminous floodwaters met the final and last dam at Anilao Bridge, the overflow caused by driftwood and other debris inundated Isla Verde, a sandbar located just upstream of the bridge.<sup>459</sup> Of the estimated 2,500 to 3,000 residents living in Isla Verde prior to the flood, only 200 to 500 were estimated to have survived.<sup>460</sup> The bridge collapsed before floodwaters rushed on to the city proper, rising to three meters in a span of seven

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<sup>455</sup> The DENR-Region VIII, "Assessment of the Causes of the Flooding" report estimated that floodwaters reached Ormoc City by 12:00 noon of November 5. The Manila Observatory report, however, believes that massive flooding in Ormoc City occurred at 11:00 a.m.

<sup>456</sup> Along the Malbasag river and its tributaries, a conservative inventory was made of 95 trees and 357 coconut trunks, while there were 200 trees and 1,031 coconut trunks found along the Anilao River and its tributaries. These figures, however, do not include the trees and coconut trunks washed into Ormoc City and Ormoc Bay. See DENR-Region VIII, "Assessment of the Causes of the Flooding," 8.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Ronald Boy and Baby, simultaneous interviews with author, 21 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>459</sup> S. Herath, *Flood in Ormoc City November 5, 1991 Philippines Preliminary Report*. (Camp Crame, Quezon City, Philippines: National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, Undated), 11.

<sup>460</sup> H. Severino, "Ormoc revisited"; H. Severino, "Ormoc tragedy: Stage set for a repeat," 1&2; and, E. Tordesillas, "Ormoc: A year after: lessons learned, lessons ignored," 1&10. However, according to my interviews with former Isla Verde survivors, who had been evacuated to Barangay Tambulilid, those who survived numbered only 50 or less.

minutes.<sup>461</sup> The flooding then moved rapidly towards barangays Cogon, Don Felipe Larrazabal and Alegria, three of the biggest barangays in terms of population along the Anilao. Parallel to the Anilao River, the Malbasag River also overflowed, inundating Barangay Districts 16, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29. Bridges were completely destroyed and shanties along the riverbank were carried away like so many matchbox toys. Approximately one square kilometer of the heavily populated commercial and residential areas of downtown Ormoc was flooded, accounting for the heavy loss of lives and properties.<sup>462</sup> The Panalian River in Barangay Ipil, found a few kilometres away from the city center, also submerged the Panalian Bridge, washing away some houses along its banks, though the flooding was not as bad as that in the city center.<sup>463</sup> The total volume of water that flooded the city was estimated to have been 22,835,000 cubic meters.<sup>464</sup> The total amount of sediment carried by the floodwaters was thought to have been equal to the total volume of water.<sup>465</sup>

## Death and destruction

Typhoon Uring wreaked wide-scale havoc. In Negros Occidental, the primary sugar-producing province of the country, four municipalities and three cities including Bago, La Carlota and Bacolod were severely affected.<sup>466</sup> In the province of Leyte, fifteen municipalities were devastated, including Albueria, Babatngon, Burauen, Dulag, Jaro, Julita and Pastrana which all had more than ten barangays adversely affected. Most of the deaths, missing and injured were from Albueria and Burauen, while majority

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<sup>461</sup> According to the Manila Observatory report, average water depth along the city streets was from three (3) to five (5) feet, with the water rising to seven (7) feet in 15 minutes at the peak of the flood. See Environmental Research Division, *The Ormoc City Tragedy of November 5, 1991*, 17.

<sup>462</sup> DENR-Region VIII, "Update on the Effects of Typhoon Uring that hit Leyte on November 5, 1991," 1-2.

<sup>463</sup> Barangay Captain Conrado Delgado, interview with author, 10 June 2013, at Barangay Ipil City Hall, Ormoc City.

<sup>464</sup> Environmental Research Division, *The Ormoc City Tragedy of November 5, 1991*, 17.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

<sup>466</sup> Reliefweb, "Report 3: November 8, 1991"; N. Abrematea, "Heavy floods hit Leyte; folk fleeing homes," in *Philippine Star*, 6 November 1991, 1&8; M. Logan, "Typhoon leaves 2,122 dead in Leyte, Negros; 1,494 families rendered homeless," in *Philippine Times Journal*, 7 November 1991, 1&6; L. Lacson and N. Abrematea, "'Uring' kills 2,122 in Leyte, renders 200,000 homeless," in *Philippine Star*, 7 November 1991, 1&6; E. Tordesillas et al., "Leyte death toll rises to 6,500," in *Malaya*, 8 November 1991, 1&3.

of families affected came from Albuera, Burauen, Dagami, Dulag, and Julita. But none of these municipalities came near to the devastation experienced by Ormoc City, as revealed in the validated disaster damage report compiled by the Manila Observatory in 1992:

**Table 4.2**

**Validated Disaster Damage Report, as of 7 January 1992**

Municipality	No. of barangays affected	Casualties			Number of Affected		Damaged Houses	
		Dead	Missing	Injured	Families	Persons	Totally	Partially
Albuera	16	12	10	55	2,906	17,436	250	2,656
Babatngon	22	-	-	6	829	4,974	25	793
Baybay	1	2	-	-	2	12	2	-
Burauen	28	42	4	109	2,537	11,289	444	2,093
Dagami	6	1	-	33	3,730	7,526	82	1,100
Dulag	23	6	-	-	2,041	12,246	356	1,705
Jaro	16	7	-	5	500	2,100	93	398
Julita	16	1	-	21	1,000	3,160	113	706
Mayorga	4	-	-	-	250	1,500	20	385
Merida	3	-	-	-	322	1,932	20	302
Pastrana	11	7	-	-	646	3,876	109	537
Tabontabon	6	3	-	-	584	2,748	7	-
Tunga	3	-	-	8	50	200	10	40
Tacloban City	5	-	-	-	6	48	-	-
Ormoc City	110	4,000 <sup>a</sup>	2,500	3,020	22,891	122,363	2,915	11,514
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>4,081</b>	<b>2,514</b>	<b>3,257</b>	<b>38,294</b>	<b>193,410</b>	<b>4,446</b>	<b>22,229</b>

**Notes:**

<sup>a</sup> In the report by the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council (PDCC) as of 3:00 p.m. of 18 November 1991, submitted by the office of Governor Leopoldo Petilla to Chief Supt. Vicente Garcia, Chair of the Regional Disaster Coordinating Council (RDCC), Ormoc's reported deaths had already reached 4,555 by 18 November 1991.

**Source:** Based on "Table 1: Validated Disaster Damage Report, Typhoon Uring, as of January 7, 1992", in Environmental Research Division, *The Ormoc City Tragedy of November 5, 1991*, 5.

In Ormoc alone, where the extent of deaths and infrastructural damage had been highest, casualty estimates varied widely:

**Table 4.3**

**Estimates of dead, injured and missing, number of families and/or persons affected, and number/value of properties damaged in Ormoc City**

Casualty			Rendered Homeless (By family or persons)	Affected (By family or persons)	Damages to property	Source
Dead	Injured	Missing				
At least 2,133	23	3,333	121,500 persons	-	-	Philippine National Red Cross (as of 7 November 1991) <sup>a</sup>
3,009	-	2,012	42,600 persons	120,000 persons		UNDRO (as of 11 November 1991) <sup>b</sup>
Approx. 8,000	-	-	-	-		Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group (1991) <sup>c</sup>
4,555	1,202	20	621 families	-	-	PDCC (18 November 1991) <sup>d</sup>
4,875	-	-	-	-	-	Severino (1992) <sup>e</sup>
Approx. 3,000	3,257	Approx. 1,000	-	22,891 families or 122,363 persons	2,915 houses completely destroyed; 11,514 partially but heavily destroyed	De Leon and Laigo (1993) <sup>f</sup>
4,922	-	3,000			> P620 million	Memorial site, Ormoc Public Cemetery (2011) <sup>g</sup>

**Notes and Sources:**

<sup>a</sup> Cited in C. Velarde et al., “2,000 dead; 3,000 missing in Leyte town,” *Malaya*, 7 November 1991, 1&2.

<sup>b</sup> Reliefweb also noted that the “[e]xact number [had] to be verified, since people [in Ormoc] buried relatives without informing authorities.” Reliefweb, “Report 4: November 11, 1991,” in *Philippines Floods Nov 1991 UNDRO Situation Reports 1-8* (Online). For the number of injured, UNDRO stated that the “relatively low number of injured reflects sudden nature and strength of the floods, which reached height up to ten feet.”

<sup>c</sup> R. Gloria, Chair in Ormoc Task Force Scientific Study Group Report (1991), Annex 1.

<sup>d</sup> Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council, *Disaster Report Form II, Progress Report Re Typhoon Uring as of 3:00 PM November 18, 1991*, submitted by the Office of Governor Leopoldo Petilla, Chair of the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council (PDCC), to Chief Supt. Vicente Garcia, Chair of the Regional Disaster Coordinating Council (RDCC).

<sup>e</sup> Cited as official figures by the city government in H. Severino, “Ormoc revisited,” first published in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (April 21-22, 1992). Also H. Severino, “Ormoc tragedy: Stage set for a repeat,” *Malaya*, 20 April 1992, 1&2.

<sup>f</sup> De Leon and Laigo further note that “these statistics are conservative compared to the figures given by the media. The number of missing persons and unconfirmed deaths can



be very high.” C. De Leon and L. Laigo, “Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc: Experiences and Insights of Administrators,” 327-335.

<sup>9</sup> Etched onto the monument built on top of the mass grave at the Ormoc Public Cemetery inaugurated on November 7, 2011 as part of the 20-year anniversary of the tragedy. The inauguration was led by mayor Eric Codilla, who said that lives lost in November 1991 was nearly 8,000.

Confusion persists on just how many were killed and still remain missing today as a result of that flash flood. Indeed, twenty-two years hence, the efficient assessment and recording of disaster casualties is a recurring issue in the Philippines, notably highlighted in the aftermath of another appalling tragedy in November 2013, when Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) caused a storm surge in Leyte and eastern Samar that devastated Tacloban City and other municipalities. President Benigno Aquino blamed ‘emotional drama’ for an early estimate of 10,000 deaths and consequently lowered it to 2,000.<sup>467</sup> Of course, actual reports would later show the fallacy of Aquino’s premature statement,<sup>468</sup> but the recent discourse illustrates the recurring political nature of estimating casualties in the aftermath of major disasters.<sup>469</sup> In Ormoc in 1991, the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) itself noted in its report that many survivors buried their dead without informing authorities, a situation repeated in the November 2013 storm surge of Typhoon Yolanda.<sup>470</sup> In addition, the local government in Ormoc at that time had admitted that no precise accounting of the dead was made due to the lack of personnel and “the more pressing need to immediately bury the corpses and take care of the survivors,”<sup>471</sup> in order to avoid the spread of contagious diseases. So how *were* the estimates arrived at in 1991? Barangay officials were crucial in reporting casualties in their own

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<sup>467</sup> See, for example, N. Golgowski, “Typhoon Haiyan death toll closer to 2,000, Philippine president says, amid 2 American casualties,” in *Daily News*, 12 November 2013 (Online).

<sup>468</sup> Reported deaths from Supertyphoon Haiyan (Yolanda) and the resulting storm surge were 6,201 individuals as of 6:00 a.m. on January 29, 2014; 28,626 injured and 1,785 missing. National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), “NDRRMC Update, SitRep No. 104 Effects of Typhoon ‘Yolanda’ (Haiyan)’ (January 29, 2014)” (Online).

<sup>469</sup> “After disaster, tallying death toll difficult,” in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 14 November 2013 (Online).

<sup>470</sup> Reliefweb, “Report 4: November 11, 1991.” Dr. Celso Adolfo, Ormoc City Health Officer, said an accurate death count was difficult because many people were finding and burying relatives without notifying authorities. See R. Puaben and M.R. Feliciano, “Cory off to Leyte; denudation probed,” *Malaya*, 10 November 1991, 1&2.

<sup>471</sup> M. Duenas, “Tragedy in Ormoc: Killer flood,” *Philippine Free Press*, 23 November 1991, 4-5 & 21.

barangays.<sup>472</sup> The local government—specifically the City Disaster Coordinating Council (CDCC), which in November 1991 was observed to have been largely non-operational<sup>473</sup>--then collated the information for further verification and collation by the Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council (PDCC) and the Regional Disaster Coordinating Council (RDCC). The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), which at the time had not yet devolved its functions to the local government as part of the provisions of the 1991 Local Government Code,<sup>474</sup> had its own estimates based on its own reporting and operation procedures.<sup>475</sup> The Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), meanwhile, issued another set of casualty estimates.<sup>476</sup>

These widely varying estimates have resulted in a statistical dilemma, a situation also experienced after the 2004 Asian tsunami where separate government offices in Indonesia gave significantly different figures, and again after the November 2013 Typhoon Yolanda storm surge which pitted local officials' estimates with that of the national 'official' one. In Ormoc, the death toll after the 1991 tragedy has contributed to the mythical ominous aura of the flood in various retelling, but also to the allegation that the numbers had been deliberately bloated to attract more international aid.<sup>477</sup> Nevertheless, what is clear is that there had been no attempt, either by the local government or private entities and individuals, to systematically list the

<sup>472</sup> See, for example, N. Abrematea, "Heavy floods hit Leyte; folk fleeing homes," *Philippine Star*, 6 November 1991, 1&8.

<sup>473</sup> C. de Leon and L. Laigo, "Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc: Experiences and insights of administrators," in *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* (Diliman, Quezon City: College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines, 1993), 330.

<sup>474</sup> Republic Act No. 7160, *Local Government Code of the Philippines, Devolving Certain Functions to LGUs, including the Enforcement of Laws on Cleanliness and Sanitation, and Preparation of their Respective Solid Waste Management Programs*, Art. 13, "The Social Welfare and Development Officer," effectively transferring public functions in social welfare and development to the local government.

<sup>475</sup> See, for example, de Leon and Laigo, "Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc," 327-335.

<sup>476</sup> See, for example, L. Lacson and N. Abrematea, "'Uring' kills 2,122 in Leyte, renders 200,000 homeless," *Philippine Star*, 7 November 1991, 1&6; C. Velarde et al., "2,000 dead; 3,000 missing in Leyte Floods," *Malaya*, 7 November 1991, 1&2; and, E. Tordesillas et al., "Leyte death toll rises to 6,500," *Malaya*, 8 November 1991, 1&3.

<sup>477</sup> Anonymous interview with a former City Administrator by the author, 7 October 2013, in Ormoc City Hall. Respondent alleged that he did not believe the number of dead in 1991 reached more than 1,000 and that it was highly possible this figure had been bloated to attract more funding. He insisted it was mind-boggling to imagine 8,000 being washed out to sea or even the number of trips a dump truck would make to cart away 5,000 people when a truckload of dead bodies would at most carry only about 50 in one trip.

names of the dead and missing. Today, they continue to remain faceless and nameless in a city that has retained few visible reminders of that fateful day. They remain anonymous even in the mass grave where thousands of bodies were buried in November 1991. It is also irrefutable that most of those who perished came from “highly-populated low-income settlements in an area of approximately twenty-five sq. km outside the town center.”<sup>478</sup> It is to these low-income settlements and those who resided in them that we come to next, in an attempt to resurrect lives that had been largely forgotten by a city intent on looking forward to further urbanization rather than in a contemplation of its past.

### ***Isla Verde: Isle of death***

Isla Verde, contrary to its name, was not a real island. It was a sandbar created by accretion, “a delta of alluvial deposit along the Anilao river.”<sup>479</sup> Strategically located just outside the city proper, it was a highly congested place in 1991 that should never have been utilized as a residential area. But, in reality, it was like a small island with its own codes of conduct, culture, and small bridges that regulated entry and exit. One of its most prominent structures prior to the flash flood was a hanging bridge that connected Isla Verde to the other side of the Anilao River and on to the city center. Politically part of Barangay District 26 rather than a separate barangay as reported in newspapers in 1991,<sup>480</sup> Isla Verde grew out of two families leasing some parcels of the land to migrants. These migrants were a mix of those who came from the rural areas of Ormoc and from other parts of the Visayas, all in search of livelihoods and good fortune. They first called themselves EASAM, in recognition of the two families who owned these lands, the Eamiguels who had possession of lower lots in the heart of Anilao, and the Samsons, whose land was primarily on the upper banks.<sup>481</sup> As the

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<sup>478</sup> Reliefweb, Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> DENR-Region VIII, “Investigation report of the Ormoc City disaster,” 14.

<sup>480</sup> See, for example, L. Lacson and N. Abrematea, “‘Uring’ kills 2,122 in Leyte, renders 200,000 homeless”; C. Velarde, et al., “2,000 dead; 3,000 missing in Leyte Floods”; and, N. Abrematea, “‘Uring’ leaves 6,000 dead, missing in Leyte,” *Philippine Star*, 8 November 1991, 1&3;

<sup>481</sup> Dodong (former Catholic youth leader of EASAM, later renamed Isla Verde), interview with author, 2 June 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: “There were two [families] here before. On this side were the Samsons

population grew from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, so too its reputation as a place of trouble. It became a melting pot of all kinds of people in the city—the intermittent sex workers, drug addicts and pushers, informal sector workers, government and private sector employees who could not afford to live elsewhere, and transients whose backgrounds and characters, by virtue of being unknowns, were morally suspect. It was an area virtually “characterized by an amalgam of dilapidated housing, overcrowding, disease, poverty and vice,”<sup>482</sup> typical of urban slums around the world. Yet in fact, as bad as it had been perceived, Isla Verde was never identified as the red light district of Ormoc prior to 1991.<sup>483</sup> While Ormoc did not have a “red light district” per se and bars that operated in the sex industry were small and discreet, the coastal barangay Bat-I rather than Isla Verde was then popularly identified as the centre of the local illicit sex trade. It was where the Golden Superclub was located, the biggest and most popular disco and men’s club in the city that catered specifically to seamen from ships that occasionally docked at the port.<sup>484</sup> It was remarkable that though Barangay Bat-I was directly facing Ormoc Bay, it was not devastated at all. Indeed, the water inside the Golden Superclub rose by only about a foot that fateful day before it flushed out to sea.

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and at the lower side were the Eamiguels. There came a time when the population grew so it became more troublesome. We were the first youth [group] here who went house to house. We later thought about making a [Catholic] chapter, with a chapel. We tore down a house and made an altar. It started from there when the older residents said it wasn’t a chapel. Let’s put an altar with saints. It started there. The houses came, then the chapel and then the two leading families began to talk about the fiesta. Then we called this place EASAM, Eamiguel-Samson Village. EASAM. Then there were more and more people...the name was changed because EASAM meant ‘trouble.’ It was here where people would meet to settle scores. So it was changed to Isla Verde because people thought the place was green.” [Fedelina, a neighbor: Yes, because in the past trees were abundant, coconut trees].

<sup>482</sup> M. Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 22.

<sup>483</sup> See, for example, L. Jimenea (journalist), interview with author, 12 March 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in English, transcribed by author. Asked if Isla Verde had ever been a red light district, she said: “No. It was not a red light district, but it was where it could have been, it was where all things could happen and where all kinds of people lived, drug dealers, prostitutes, hardworking people.”

<sup>484</sup> Dindin (daughter of the owners and operators of the Golden Superclub), interview with author, 7 October 2013, in Bat1, Ormoc City. Dindin was only nine years old in November 1991 and was not allowed inside the club by her parents. According to Dindin, the Golden Superclub did not operate a brothel. It was a disco and a bar, but nude shows were shown on special days of the week. It also did not directly hire the girls. A *mamasan*, who worked outside the Golden Superclub was usually the one who hired the girls mostly from rural areas and then managed their trade. Aside from seamen, notable clients were businessmen and PNOC employees, who at the time were paid well enough in a small city like Ormoc to afford extra expenses like these.

Isla Verde's infamous notoriety was largely due to its location. It was certainly not the only informal settlement in the city, but it was highly visible, sprawled just beyond the Anilao Bridge as one entered the city proper. Yet, efforts to 'clean' the face of the area had been voluntarily undertaken by the residents themselves years prior to the November 1991 tragedy.<sup>485</sup> First, they renamed it Isla Verde to project an image of a 'green' environment, taking its name from the many trees, mostly coconuts that provided plentiful shade to its residents. Then, the elders and youth leaders changed Isla Verde's *fiesta* from 28-29 June—the feast date of the city's patron Saints Peter and Paul—to 19-20 June in efforts to ensure that the residents could properly celebrate their *fiesta* separate from the city celebrations. It was also a pragmatic decision to resolve the occurrence of brawls and other petty crimes and unruly behaviors that broke out in the evening of *fiestas* when young men, drunk from a day of drinking in the city, would come home to a place where majority of its residents would have also been away to the city. However, in the aftermath of the 1991 tragedy, it was commonly referred to as the Sodom and Gomorrah of Ormoc, complicit in its own destruction, and hastened by its very immorality and amorality, namely its culture of *omerta* that contributed, by ensuring silence, to the perpetuation of legally questionable acts occurring within its boundaries.<sup>486</sup> It was undoubtedly a hive of human activity, its very existence dependent on a city that maintained a morally questionable symbiotic relationship with its residents.

Flooding prior to 1991 was a fact of life in Isla Verde. When rains came, the Anilao River would rise a little, but not enough to unduly worry its residents. They coped, as always, but never to the extent of actually

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<sup>485</sup> See Dodong, interview with author, Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Not everyone shared this stereotypical view. See, for example, L. Jimenea (journalist), interview with author, Ibid. On the question why Isla Verde was known as Sodom and Gomorrah (original statement in mixed English and Filipino, transcribed by author): "I think that is way judgmental...You know these places where you see the bad, but you also see the good you can see that. You see Mother Teresas there and you see the most evil of people like that. I would not believe that everybody was bad there...a lot of them are hardworking people who just don't have the money to buy their own subdivisions." On *omerta*: "...when you talk about informal settlers...there are people, you can have people who are just minding their own business, just living you know...Sometimes you just don't [tell], *omerta*, the law of silence. You don't talk. You don't say anything bad against your neighbour. To each his own, that was Isla Verde. It's everywhere. It's in every informal settler community."

evacuating to higher grounds. That Tuesday morning in November 1991, residents thought it was just another typhoon so most of them simply stayed put inside their houses. However, some of the luckier ones who escaped sure death, uneasy about the rain, had knocked on neighbors' doors, implored them to leave before it was too late, and evacuated early. Some heeded these urgent calls, but the majority did not. When the overflow of the floodwaters from the Anilao River came at about 11:30 a.m. and inundated Isla Verde, not everyone panicked. The waters were still manageable and, though some had been washed out with their houses, many others clung to telephone cables, electric wires and trees that provided lifelines in the floodwaters.<sup>487</sup> There was as yet no sense of panic. A spirit of *bayanihan*<sup>488</sup> even prevailed, as those who could not swim were passed on by one set of helping hands to another to ultimately grab the electric cables that crisscrossed in the flood waters. Some lashed small children against coconut trees, in hopes to save them.<sup>489</sup> But when the Anilao Bridge suddenly gave way and released a massive volume of water, in seconds the situation became deadly.<sup>490</sup> It was like a great force had flushed the water out to sea, carrying everything in its path—the flimsy houses, the families that desperately clung together, the bridge that could not withstand the immense pressure of those waters. The floodwaters were disturbingly turbid, twisting

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<sup>487</sup> L. Jimenea (journalist), interview of author, *Ibid.*, original in mixed English and Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: "We saw many friends, that's when I learned that the sibling of one of my friends, the Nazarios, they lost 18 members. Then they told me when water rose in Isla Verde it was like it was nothing. Because the bridge got stuck up, like it dammed. So it stuck up. They were just swimming across. They were not in a hurry. It was like, okay, sure, they weren't really in a hurry, they were passing one to the other. They had this long cable like maybe for electricity and those who could not swim were helped from one point to the other."

<sup>488</sup> Filipino, lit. to help achieve something together as one community.

<sup>489</sup> See, for example, Solemnisa (former Isla Verde resident), interview with author, 30 May 2013, in Ormoc City. She lashed her four children against a coconut tree. Two children were saved, but two died, along with her husband, who remains missing until today.

<sup>490</sup> L. Jimenea (journalist), interview with author, *Ibid.*, original in mixed English and Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: "But when the bridge gave in, it was when it gave in that it was like a torpedo. We [referring to her husband] had a friend, he's dead now, we had one friend who in just a matter of seconds he was in the middle of Linao Sea, it was there he swam and then he swam back. But along the way, it was like he was torpedoed. He was the sole survivor of their family. Along the way he said, in the turbulent water, he hung on to a log, like that, like he was forced, like he straddled a banana boat, he would go under the water, he would go over the water but he did not let go. So in just a matter of seconds, he was in the middle of Linao. So he swam back and, I don't know, he couldn't understand why when he was asking for help why people were fleeing from him when they saw him. It was because he was naked already, stripped naked. That was why they were running away."

like a top,<sup>491</sup> pulling everything in. Because there was so much debris, it was impossible to swim, much less to stay afloat in the churning waters. That day, Isla Verde was ‘cleansed’ as the entire community was literally washed out to the sea.

Discourses that had developed in the aftermath of the 1991 flood, centred on the story of a little thirsty boy who, days before 5 November, went to Isla Verde and begged for water.<sup>492</sup> According to the account, the boy knocked on a house near the entrance to Isla Verde,<sup>493</sup> and a maid, upon consultation with her dismissive mistress, gave him some water in a dirty coconut husk, which was typically used as drinking vessel for poultry. The boy then remarked ominously that he would give Isla Verde lots of water in days to come. In various retelling, this tale, first circulated among the survivors housed in the makeshift Tent City a few months after November 1991, had been interpreted as a story of punishment by the Santo Niño of Cebu, a popular religious icon in the Visayas.<sup>494</sup> Another version involved not a little boy, but an elderly woman asking for food and water.<sup>495</sup> The major

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<sup>491</sup> Solemnisa (former resident of Isla Verde), interview with author, *Ibid.*, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author: “The water grew, gosh how the water grew!..When we went down, the water had reached our roof! So we had a basin, we used it to float. People were being pulled in because there was a tornado. It was the first time I saw a tornado. A tornado, it spins...” [Victor Arcuino, my interpreter: Like a top]...like a top.”

<sup>492</sup> See, for example, Nenita (resident at GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid), interview with author, 19 April 2013, in GK Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author: “I was suspicious that the skies seemed different, I don’t know why but my parents said there was something like a comet and when I looked at the heavens I saw something like a tornado, now the tornado I saw was shaped like a heart, there was something that came out of that tornado and dropped into the sea! That day I did not expect that there would be like a typhoon coming, the news said a typhoon was coming, so for me just trust in God as at that time there was a child who was rebuffed, that was the start! It was the Señor Santo Nino they said then there was an unkempt woman who was the Mother of Perpetual Help.”

<sup>493</sup> The house was allegedly owned by a Feliciano family, who provided water very grudgingly to the boy. Attempts were made to locate this family during the fieldwork in 2013, or even to confirm whether such a family existed. Both endeavors, however, failed as the author could not find anyone who could confirm the existence of a Feliciano family.

<sup>494</sup> For a discussion on why the Santo Niño remains a popular icon of Catholic religiosity not only in Cebu, but also in other parts of the country, see J. Bautista, “‘Figuring’ Catholicism: the Santo Nino and religious discourse in Cebu” (PhD diss. Australian National University College of Asia and the Pacific, 2003) (Online).

<sup>495</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth (former resident of Barangay Don Felipe Larrazabal, another heavily affected barangay along Anilao river), interview with author, 6 April 2013, GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author, when asked if she had heard any stories of the supernatural (*mga kwentong kababalaghan*): “Yes, do you know Isla Verde? Maybe someone told you the story, right? There was someone [I asked if it was the story about the boy or the elderly] a boy. No, in the beginning,

difference between these two versions is that the story of the little boy referred exclusively to Isla Verde, while the story of the old woman, often interpreted as the Virgin Mary, denoted Ormoc City in general without targeting a specific place. That these stories, popularly circulated in the city proper while being virtually unknown in the rural areas of Ormoc, were denunciations of urban suspicion of dangerous classes and the reluctance to provide help to needy strangers, attitudes common and natural to city residents who practised higher levels of individuality than in rural areas. These stories condemned selfish private interests upheld at the expense of other people's basic needs like food and water. Other stories told about the 1991 Ormoc tragedy, following the pattern of urban legends, emphasized Isla Verde's amoral and immoral behaviors that directly brought this terrible *katalagman*<sup>496</sup> upon itself. One story was about young men who had sponsored a disco on November 1<sup>st</sup> in Isla Verde, just a few days before the tragedy, an ominous day as it was a day designated for the dead and observed as such in the Philippines.<sup>497</sup> Yet another story was that Catholics who had converted to the Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC)<sup>498</sup> had in the past buried their *santos* or religious idols underground in observance of their new faith

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it was allegedly an elderly. The other one, it was a filthy child, because there were men drinking so they were joking, they teased the child. Where are you from? Please give me water. Oh we don't have water. Even a little, I am very thirsty. Because the child was barefoot. It was the Santo Niño of Cebu after all. The next day they saw the Santo Niño of Cebu with muddy feet and the hem of his clothes were also muddy. I knew of someone who went to the Cebu Cathedral, they really saw the Santo Niño's feet were muddy. Then when they gave water to the child, it was dirty, in a dirty coconut husk, anyway it was dirty. So the child said, never mind later I will give you so much water, said the child. Then the next day, there was an elderly in the terminal who was asking for food and water. They did not give anything."

<sup>496</sup> Bisaya, lit. danger/disaster/menace/peril.

<sup>497</sup> Ursula and Marilyn (mother and daughter), interview with author, 30 May 2013, in Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author: "November 1 is souls, right? It is All Souls Day, right? The next day November 1 would you believe, there was a disco [Author: Who gave a disco?] the child of a Legionary [referring to members of the Legion of Mary, a lay apostolic association of Catholics whose main role is to serve the Church on a voluntary basis] [Author: Why did the Legionary hold a disco?] the child of that Pi who died! What was Pi's family name? [Marilyn, her daughter: What was her family name? Oh Garido] Garido. That Pi Garido was a Legionary, so there I went, I told her son, *Dong*, why are you having a disco when it is the day of the dead? He told me, *Nang*, it is the day of the dead, so the dead will also disco, *Nang*!"

<sup>498</sup> Iglesia ni Cristo is a Christian denomination religion founded in 1914 by Felix Manalo in the Philippines.



and that the flood, like a god, had dug up these images, wrathfully and in vengeance, and brought them back to light.<sup>499</sup>

### Other victims, other informal settlements

The collapse of the Anilao Bridge in November 1991 further proved the limitations of modern scientifically engineered structures like bridges, even though these had withstood past hazards and appeared invincible. Of the eighty (80) tropical cyclones that crossed the province of Leyte including those passing fifty (50) kilometers from its boundaries from 1948 to 1991, with most of these occurring in November, twenty-five (25) had passed over Leyte province.<sup>500</sup> None of these typhoons had adversely affected Ormoc, much more caused a flood. Nonetheless, as early as 1862, a story of an upcoming flood so big as to sink Leyte island had been preached by a group identified as a *Dios-Dios* (demigod, false god) movement.<sup>501</sup> Mariano Ricafort, a town leader (*cabecilla*) from Burauen and a believer of Benedicta, who had designated herself as *La Santa de Leyte* and drew some 4,000 followers from northeastern Leyte, proclaimed a place called *Monte de Pobres* (Mountain of the Poor) as the “surest and safest place because the water height would not reach that far.”<sup>502</sup> Interestingly, flood predictions have remained popular in Leyte among other more recent millenarian groups.<sup>503</sup>

It was this absence of historical precedence, however, that to a large extent explained why Ormoc City was so unprepared that day. By 1991, the riverbanks of both Anilao and Malbasag teemed with low-income families in

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<sup>499</sup> Ursula and Marilyn, interview with author, Ibid. Mr. Fernando Villanueva (legal officer and minister of INC in Ormoc City), in a 7 June 2013 letter, denied this allegation through a written statement when asked to comment on this matter, to wit: “It’s not true, that they buried the *rebutos* under the ground. Maybe it is the perception of the non-members because we do not worship images or idols. It is according to Exo. 20: 3-5.”

<sup>500</sup> Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), Climate and Agromet Data Section, Climatology and Agrometeorology Division, “Information on Tropical Cyclone (1948-2009).”

<sup>501</sup> G. Borrinaga, “The Pulahan movement in Leyte (1902-1907),” in *The Journal of History* 54 (Philippine National Historical Society, 2008), 214-215.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> One of these groups was called *Pilipinas Watawat ng Lahi* (Philippines, Flag of Race) or *Diyos ng Pilipinas* (God of the Philippines), a millenarian group headed by ‘Tatay’ a.k.a Catalino Pepito of Barangay Naungan in Ormoc. ‘Tatay’ said he predicted the 1991 flood, which saved members of his group then. He is predicting another major flood to occur and devastate Ormoc. Catalino Pepito, interview with author in Bisaya, 4 October 2013, in Barangay Domonar Puting Bato, Ormoc City.

houses made of light and scrap materials. It was significant that the Anilao River, for example, was only approximately thirty (30) meters wide before the flood, as urban zoning had been largely ignored and disregarded by informal settlers. After the flood, it widened to fifty (50) meters.<sup>504</sup> Meanwhile, the Malbasag River in the southern part of the city meandered as it snaked its way down to Ormoc City, passing beneath the Malbasag Bridge that had a constricted channel. In 1991, therefore, both rivers had major chokepoints, and were potential disasters waiting to happen.

### **Ormoc's series of disasters**

The notion that “a disaster is not a single, discrete event” was certainly true in the high propensity of informal settlements in Ormoc to “repeated, multiple, mutually reinforcing and sometimes simultaneous shocks to their families, their settlements and their livelihoods.”<sup>505</sup> A community called Badlas in Barangay Don Felipe, for example, experienced a series of community and family tragedies prior to 1991. First was a fire that razed several houses in the vicinity in January 1990, followed by the damages wrought by Typhoon Ruping (Mike) in November 1990 that brought winds of up to 230 kilometer per hour, strong enough to knock down houses made of light materials. The flash flood in November 1991 completed the massive cumulative tragedy experienced by these families, when the new *payags* (thatched houses) erected after the devastation of Typhoon Ruping in 1990 were completely washed away in 1991.<sup>506</sup> Yet, this was not unique to Ormoc in 1991. In the neighboring municipality of Dulag in western Leyte, for example, a laundrywoman named Norma Cadion, who was thirty-five (35)

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<sup>504</sup> DENR-Region VIII, “Update on the effects of Typhoon Uring that hit Leyte on November 5, 1991,” 1-2.

<sup>505</sup> B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon and I. Davis (eds), *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Natural Disasters*, 5.

<sup>506</sup> Eunila and Nezele (neighbors in GK Tambulilid), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author: “In November was the flood, there was typhoon in 1990 [Nezele: Yes a typhoon], it was 1990 when there was a fire I said what a serious tragedy! From the fire there was typhoon Ruping followed by the flood in 1991 [Nezele: Here] by [Nezele: Uring] Yuring (sic)...They just re-thatched their houses. Yes after Ruping! It was not that bad because the houses were not washed away. In Yuring they were completely washed away! My mother very nearly died because she was inside the house when it was washed away, my father was luckier by evacuating! He got inside a house and was able to save a child who he held at the height of the flood and carried away with him.”

years old in 1991, lost all five of her children aged one to seven years when a nearby dam burst and destroyed Daguitan Bridge at the height of Typhoon Uring. Months earlier in March 1991, her husband, who was a farmer, had been gunned down “after resisting their landowner’s attempt to boot them out of the land they were tilling.”<sup>507</sup>

Like the case of Isla Verde, residents in the informal settlements of Barangays Alegria and Don Felipe Larrazabal, which were directly hit by the massive water released after the collapse of the Anilao Bridge, were caught off-guard. The flash flood had been so quick and so immense that there was simply no time to evacuate at the last minute.<sup>508</sup> It is instructive that “[a] significant number of casualties were children trapped inside homes unable to open the doors held by hyper concentrated flood waters.”<sup>509</sup> Yet, it was not only children, but also old people and babies, who would provide the most lasting and horrific images of the flood. Two days after, on 7 November, Cebu Governor Emilio Osmeña observed dramatically, “It looked like a Nazi (death) camp, with children and old people piled on top of each other.”<sup>510</sup> Of the babies, another journalist remarked, “A lot of babies [were lined up at the City Health Office]...when babies die of drowning they are not like the old ones. The older ones you know they struggled...to live. Babies were like they were just being lulled to sleep, there were no signs of struggle on their faces, like they were only sleeping.”<sup>511</sup> A number of those who perished, like Lot’s wife in the Bible who turned into a pillar of salt after looking back at a burning

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<sup>507</sup> See D. Petilla, “Widow’s tale of woe: A fate worse than Job’s,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 November 1991, 1&13.

<sup>508</sup> For example, Papenuncia (resident of GK Tambulilid), interview with author, 16 April 2013, in GK Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: “First there were three blasts! Bog! Bog! Bog! It was the water apparently! There in the mountains! *Buhawi!* They’re called *buhawi!* Oh the water! Running! Running away! People were drowning! There in the sea. They were asking for help. But how to help them? The water was like this. There in the bridge! They couldn’t do anything!”

<sup>509</sup> S. Herath, “Floods in Ormoc City, Leyte on November 5, 1991,” 39-40.

<sup>510</sup> Cited in G. Dumat-ol, “It looked like a Nazi death camp,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 November 1991, 1&9.

<sup>511</sup> L. Jimenea, interview with author, *Ibid.*, original in mixed English and Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: “Those babies when they die of drowning they are not like the adults. Adults you know they struggled, they struggled to live. The babies maybe okay I am being rocked to sleep, like they don’t have any sign of struggle in their faces, like they are only sleeping. It was really amazing looking at them, like they are so peaceful. But the old people that you see, you see their tortured faces. I said if there’s one thing I wouldn’t like to die of, that’s drowning. You lose your poise [laughs].”

Sodom and Gomorrah, returned to save pigs, poultry, a sack of rice, meagre possessions like clothes and even television sets, and small savings packed hastily in bags, seemingly mundane things that for those who had so few possessions in the first place meant the entire world.<sup>512</sup> Yet for those who had escaped death with only *taput lawas* or just the clothes on their backs, the prospect of starting anew from ground zero again was, for many, like death itself. In five cases chosen to describe the nature of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the 1991 Ormoc survivors, it was noted that, in addition to the loss of family members, the loss of livelihood, savings and homes were extreme traumatic events that defined an individual's ability or inability to cope and rebuild a new life.<sup>513</sup>

The force of the water from the twin rivers flushing out into Ormoc Bay was such that bodies were found all the way to the island of Camotes, forty kilometers west of Leyte, and even Bohol, which was 120.82 kilometers southeast of Leyte.<sup>514</sup> Sharks allegedly had fed off some of the corpses.<sup>515</sup>

The rain stopped at the upper reaches of the Ormoc watershed in the Tongonan area immediately after 11:00 a.m. and "no additional rain was added to the rain gauge of the PNOC."<sup>516</sup> Flooding in the Ormoc downtown area, on the other hand, was over in three hours. After the waters receded,

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<sup>512</sup> For example, Merlita (resident of GK Tambulilid), interview with author, 5 April 2013, in Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, whose husband went back to get about 700 pesos, which were the day's income from their *sari-sari* (merchandise) store. She lost one boy, aged 7. Also Shirley, interview with author, 16 April 2013, in Ormoc City, whose mother went back to save two pigs. The pigs survived, but her mother and two siblings died, with one remaining missing until today.

<sup>513</sup> P. Alix, "Prolonged psychosocial effects of the Ormoc disaster, the role of personal variables, stressor characteristics, and coping responses," in *Papers and Proceedings, International Symposium on Disasters and Health*, organized and hosted by University of the Philippines-Manila and the International Center for Medical Research, in Kobe, Japan, 16-18 October 1996 (Manila, Philippines: IPPAO, 1997), 92-131.

<sup>514</sup> J. Cadacio and C. Pablo, "Cory airs worldwide appeal for Leyte aid," *Malaya*, 9 November 1991, 1&6; V. Batic, "58 bodies of Ormocans washed ashore in Bohol," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 November 1991, 7.

<sup>515</sup> B. Drogin, "Amid devastation, Ormoc buries its dead: Philippines: mass graves are prepared for victims of Tuesday's tropical storm, since there aren't enough coffins. The toll could go to 3,400," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 November 1991. [http://articles.latimes.com/1991-11-08/news/mn-947\\_1\\_mass-grave](http://articles.latimes.com/1991-11-08/news/mn-947_1_mass-grave) ; "Sharks feasting on floating bodies," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 November 1991, 1&12; N. Abrematea, "Death is everywhere in Ormoc," *Philippine Star*, 9 November 1991, 1&2; and, J. Cadacio and C. Pablo, "Cory airs worldwide appeal for Leyte aid".

<sup>516</sup> DENR-Region VIII, "Investigation Report of the Ormoc City Disaster," 13.

there was a two-feet deep sediment along the streets.<sup>517</sup> But, outside of Ormoc, no one had any inkling of the extent of the tragedy as the day drew to a close. In fact, even by the next day, on 6 November, three of the country's biggest news companies—*Philippine Star*, *Malaya*, and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*—had no idea that in Ormoc an unimaginable tragedy had occurred.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Environmental Research Division, *The Ormoc City Tragedy of November 5, 1991*, 17.

<sup>518</sup> See, for example, N. Abrematea, "Heavy floods hit Leyte; folk fleeing homes"; V. Batic, "Floods, landslides kill 126 in Leyte," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 6 November 1991, 1; C. Pablo, "Rise in illegal logging cases blamed on pols," *Malaya*, 6 November 1991, 6.

## IN THE AFTERMATH

*As a final note, the disaster of Ormoc has, unfortunately, been explained (and exploited) by some individuals and sectors in terms of speculations, misinformation, and statements not backed up by scientific evidence. Even after the evidences have been presented the misrepresentation are still being pursued, obviously to serve personal ends no longer related to the disaster. Such actuation have caused, and are still causing confusion, misdirected anger, witch-hunting, and public disinformation. These efforts continue to pin down fall guys in order to cover up for the failures (through omission or commission) of certain leaders to look after the welfare of their constituents. Under such circumstances, the real reason for the disaster could not be fully ventilated, actions to prevent or mitigate similar disasters could not be fully discussed in public, and the debate in public fora and media will continue until the issue dies a natural death. Then nobody would have made any precautionary preparations, nor learned any lesson from this disaster.*

- Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-Region VIII, "Assessment of the causes of the flooding of Ormoc City, Leyte Island, Philippines," 10-11<sup>519</sup>

*"When are we going to get our next meal?" wailed Laura Montesclaros, 53, of Barangay Malbasag, echoing a common complaint.*

-Cited in D. Petilla, "NGOs launch Operation Noah's Ark," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 November 1991, 1&10.

A full two days passed before the rest of the country awoke to the utter devastation wrought by Typhoon Uring in Ormoc. In fact, it was not Ormoc, but the municipalities of Jaro, Tabontabon, Dagami, Pastrana, and Burauen in Leyte province, and the cities of Bacolod, La Carlota and Bago and the towns of Sumbag and Murcia in Negros Occidental that were reported to have been worst hit.<sup>520</sup> By 7 November, the United Nations

<sup>519</sup> Post script in the "Consolidated Technical findings of the Five technical services of DENR Region VIII (Eastern Visayas): Forest Management, Mines and Geosciences, Environmental Management and Protection Areas, Lands Management, and Ecosystems Research and Development."

<sup>520</sup> N. Abrematea, "Heavy floods hit Leyte; folk fleeing homes," *Philippine Star*, 6 November 1991, 1 and 8; V. Batic, "Floods, landslides kill 126 in Leyte," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 6 November 1991, 1; V. Batic and B. Cabrido, "2,230 die in Leyte floods," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 November 1991, 1 and 9; M. Logan, "Typhoon leaves 2,122 dead in Leyte, Negros; 1,494 families rendered homeless," *Philippine Times Journal*, 7 November 1991, 1 and 6; R. Requintana, "2,122 feared dead in Leyte, Negros floods," *Manila Bulletin*, 7 November 1991, 1 and 19; L. Lacson and N. Abrematea, "'Uring' kills 2,122 in Leyte, renders 200,000 homeless," *Philippine Star*, 7 November 1991, 1 and 6. *Malaya* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer* ran the first news articles on 7 November 1991 that identified Ormoc as the hardest hit, along with Burauen and Julita, as disaster areas. See C. Velarde et al,

Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) noted that Ormoc Port, with 120,000 inhabitants, was “ravaged by water-borne debris and mud.”<sup>521</sup> Isla Verde and the barangays of Malbasag, Alegria and Don Felipe in Ormoc were declared “ghost towns.”<sup>522</sup> Electricity was down in large parts of Leyte and Negros, as hundreds of electric posts were destroyed. Numerous bridges in both provinces were washed away, rendering many towns and cities unreachable in the initial week of relief efforts. Agricultural crops and livestock destroyed in the two provinces were estimated to be at least 200 million pesos.<sup>523</sup> The horrific devastation prompted President Cory Aquino on 7 November to declare a state of calamity in the provinces of Leyte and Southern Leyte.<sup>524</sup>

Aside from the number of casualties and physical damages that result from such a disaster, which are more explicit and immediate, indirect economic and socio-political effects can follow crisis situations or emergencies. Destruction to housing and infrastructure creates, in the short term, unavoidable and oftentimes onerous costs at the personal, familial, local and national levels. These costs can be felt either directly as a result of interruption in “the flows of goods, services and information in and around the city,” and indirectly as “costs of goods that will not be produced and services that will not be provided because of a disaster.”<sup>525</sup> At the macro-economic level, secondary effects from a disaster are felt as negative impacts on the gross domestic product (GDP), depleted monetary reserves,

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“2,000 dead; 3,000 missing in Leyte floods,” *Malaya*, 7 November 1991, 1 and 2; and, G. Dumat-ol, “It looked like a Nazi death camp,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 November 1991, 1 and 9.

<sup>521</sup> Reliefweb, “Report 3: November 8, 1991, in *Philippine floods Nov 1991 UNDRO Situation Reports 1-8* (Online).

<sup>522</sup> C. Velarde et al., “2,000 dead; 3,000 missing in Leyte floods.”

<sup>523</sup> N. Abrematea, “‘Uring’ leaves 6,000 dead, missing in Leyte,” *Philippine Star*, 8 November 1991, 1 and 3. The National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) report estimates total damages affecting all sectors, including agricultural products/facilities and infrastructure/utilities at 863.4 million pesos. See S. Herath, “Flood in Ormoc City Nov 5, 1991 Philippines Preliminary Report,” Annex 1.

<sup>524</sup> “Leyte declared a calamity area,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 November 1991, 1 and 12. See Proclamation No. 828 s. 1991, “Declaring a state of public calamity in the provinces of Leyte and Southern Leyte, including the cities of Ormoc and Tacloban, which were devastated by Typhoon ‘Uring’ (Online).

<sup>525</sup> M. Pelling, *The Vulnerability of Cities, Natural Disasters and Social Resilience* (London and Sterling VA: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2003), 39-41; K. Jha Abhas, R. Bloch and J. Lamond, *Cities and Flooding: A Guide to Integrated Urban Flood Risk Management for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / International Development Association or the World Bank, 2012), especially 143-169.

and increased debt to fund reconstruction and rehabilitation. In the long term, socio-political effects can also occur.<sup>526</sup> In both instances, government institutions may be put at risk by political challenges to authority. As social norms and values often collapse after a disaster, a corresponding breakdown in social order can expose the tenuous socio-economic and political structures that had defined collective life during 'normal' periods. On the one hand, the local government may be so incapacitated that criminality, or more appropriately rumors of crimes, can heighten people's fear, anxiety and sense of helplessness as the government may be increasingly perceived unable to provide law and order.<sup>527</sup> On the other hand, disaster aftermath can open competition and/or conflict between local government vis-à-vis national government,<sup>528</sup> amongst various stakeholders,<sup>529</sup> and within victim-survivor communities themselves, thereby creating winners and losers in the process.<sup>530</sup> As victim-survivors attempt to cope in the aftermath of a disaster, several scenarios can quickly unfold: new communities and groups emerge with new constellations of interests and power; new leadership can result in

<sup>526</sup> The 1972 earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua was argued to have prompted popular revolutionary action against the Somoza dictatorship that eventually led to the overthrow of the regime. The 1976 earthquake in Guatemala City in Guatemala, described as a 'classquake' because of its high impact among slum residents, fomented popular mobilization and "land invasions." Cited in Pelling, *The Vulnerability of Cities, Natural Disasters and Social Resilience*, 43. Also E. Allen, "Political responses to flood disaster: The example of Rio de Janeiro," in *Disasters, Development and Environment*, ed. A. Varley (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto and Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), 99-108.

<sup>527</sup> See, for example, D. McCullough, *The Johnstown Flood, The Incredible Story Behind One of the Most Devastating Disasters America has Ever Known* (New York, London, Toronto and Sydney: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1968). McCullough documented how the media played up these rumors. Uriel Rosenthal, on the other hand, emphasized the "mediatization" of future disasters, where "If the media define a situation as a disaster or a crisis, be sure that it will indeed be a disaster or a crisis in all its consequences." U. Rosenthal, "Future disasters, future definitions," in *What is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*, ed. E.L. Quarantelli (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 156.

<sup>528</sup> See, for example, US House of Representatives, *A Failure of Initiative*, Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 15 February 2006) (Online).

<sup>529</sup> Abhas, Bloch and Lamond identify these stakeholders in urban flood management as the "communities which are affected by the implementation (or non-implementation) of measures, community based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the responsible municipal authorities, river basin organizations or authorities, regional development authorities, scientific institutions including universities, and the private sector." Cited in Abhas, Bloch and Lamond, *Cities and Flooding: A Guide to Integrated Urban Flood Risk Management for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 520.

<sup>530</sup> See, for example, K.F. Gotham, "Critical theory and Katrina, Disaster, spectacle and immanent critique," in *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Policy, Action*, Vol 11 No. 1, 81-97 (Routledge, 2007) (Online).



new alliances and political changes; and, external institutions and organizations can intervene at various levels of the relief and rehabilitation processes. At the cultural level, disaster can also affect religious and ritual practices, as well as kinship and association. Thus, not only is the disaster aftermath rife with tension and conflict, but more importantly it opens space for discourses of social change. Of course, the permanence or transience of these changes is based on and remains rooted in the interests of those groups that eventually consolidate power and leadership.

This chapter documents the crucial period of recovery in Ormoc in the aftermath of 5 November 1991. In disaster emergency parlance, disaster recovery is a phase that aims to restore normal community activities disrupted by hazard impacts.<sup>531</sup> It involves decisions dealing with “rebuilding homes, replacing property, resuming employment, restoring businesses, and permanently repairing and rebuilding infrastructure.”<sup>532</sup> Project construction of the two billion pesos flood control project in Ormoc began in 1998 and was inaugurated by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2001. As such, the recovery phase of the 1991 Ormoc flood took ten years.

As the case of 1991 Ormoc shows, the most vulnerable groups of society—those who resided in the riskiest locations along the Anilao and Malbasag Rivers—experienced the highest numbers of death and destruction of property. Nonetheless, as in every disaster, there are winners and losers, with the former including people and institutions that are able to reap opportunities that would not otherwise had been open to them. In the short term, as the disaster area in Ormoc City overflowed with funding and material assistance, even those who had not been adversely affected also benefited to some extent in the aftermath. It must be noted that only forty per cent of Ormoc City was affected by the floods on 5 November 1991. But when financial and material aid came through, stories abounded of those who had not been affected at all but received assistance as well. The local

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<sup>531</sup> M. Lindell, “Disaster studies,” in *Sociopedia.isa*, DOI: 10.1177/2056846011111 (2011) (Online).

<sup>532</sup> G. Haddow (2008) cited in M. Baird, “The recovery phase of emergency management,” background paper prepared for the Intermodal Freight Transportation Institute (IFTI). (University of Memphis, Vanderbilt Center for Transportation Research (VECTOR), 2008), 2 (Online).

and national governments also reaped the benefits not only of international aid, but also of international attention on issues that the country was able to pragmatically utilize for subsequent support, particularly with respect to mitigation and disaster management. In addition, victim-survivor communities reaped the material benefits of aid, so that for the most vulnerable families, they were often able to access medical services and enjoyed regular food intake that they had not enjoyed in the past. Relocation to new housing also theoretically provided the best opportunities of socio-economic change for these communities. Yet, the allocation of these benefits to vulnerable communities had not been the same across all affected barangays. Those located in the city typically had better access to relief services and goods than those in rural areas. Even within urban barangays, those whose communities were better organized and led by more politically savvy and better-linked leaders got more benefits than those without such leaders. Non-government organizations (NGOs) were by far the most privileged, as international and local funding were often channelled through them rather than government agencies, which enabled them to play crucial roles in shaping risk management policies and implementing programs related to relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. However, unlike international aid funnelled through official government channels, the media did not as scrupulously scrutinize funding for NGOs and there was often no public demand for an accounting of how these funds were utilized. Nonetheless, the dynamics of collaboration between the government and NGOs, as shown in the Ormoc case, also indicate that NGOs cannot supplant the integrating role of government in these processes, even though the latter may be at times incapacitated by trauma, indecision and inefficiency in disaster aftermath. In the end, the government remained the most critical stakeholder, with the recognized legitimacy and authority to coordinate, manage and ensure that no one got left behind, a crucial role that was not always successfully implemented in the aftermath of the November 1991 flood.

### **Gain and loss, death and life**

The tragedy of 5 November 1991 was, first and foremost, a powerful story of flood risk, widespread devastation, death and destruction. In many

instances, entire families who had stayed put inside what they believed were the sanctuaries of their homes were swept away to their death by the raging waters of the Anilao and Malbasag rivers.<sup>533</sup> The tragedy also took away in a matter of minutes what had taken many poverty-stricken Ormocanons years to build: their livelihoods, meagre savings, and what few possessions they owned.<sup>534</sup> In one day, life as people had known it in Ormoc simply disappeared. The flash flood appeared to initially level everyone, rich and poor alike, as those in the city center shared similar stories of material losses, serious economic setbacks, and emotional and psychological trauma.<sup>535</sup> Everyone who believed the tragedy had affected each one equally appropriated the identity of ‘victim’, regardless of prior economic and social circumstances. Dominica Chua of RAFI, for instance, vividly recalls:

There was this somebody who was in a cowboy suit, well-dressed, riding in a jeep, and approached me, and she was asking that she wants to get you know some of these relief materials...Because our relief materials was okay ah plywood...*nipa*, shingles, of course everything complete, nails, straw, what else? Plywood *ha*, the marine (?) ply for the walling...everything you know it’s complete for one house. It’s really complete for a house...There was this woman who approached, a very beautiful woman and she was asking, she was so arrogant and she was so—she said, “Why aren’t you giving blah blah blah?” So my team were trying to explain to her ma’am I’m so sorry

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<sup>533</sup> Primitiva and Nita (mother and daughter), simultaneous interview with author, 18 March 2013, in Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, who lost several family members, including one adult son who was swept away with his wife and six children in their *nipa* hut in Barangay Nalunopan. Also Elizabeth, interview with author, 6 April 2013, who lost entire families of her relatives, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: “...there were many who died that time, my God! So I said to myself, I can’t think about it, my relatives, they were all killed. That is why I don’t want to remember it.”

<sup>534</sup> See, for example, G. Dumat-ol, “Life goes on for survivors of killer flood,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 November 1991, 12. Fisherman Danny Magno, 40, lost his motorized *banca* and a fishing net he had saved up for three years to buy, and Ma. Remedios Ansero, 31, lost her sewing machine and all her family’s sparse savings.

<sup>535</sup> The identity as ‘victim,’ for example, had been appropriated by everyone. L. Jimenea expresses this notion succinctly in an interview with author, 12 March 2013, original in English, transcribed by author: “We didn’t even die, we were here, we were beside the river. It was just later, how I understood, you know, we did some analysis on what happened to us, why we survived, maybe God’s will, maybe it was [laughs] you know nature...But yes, I would describe ourselves as a victim because...we also had some food shortage, we had to rebuild our homes.”

ma'am you're not on the list ma'am, very polite in telling her...She was so mad already, she was so upset, she was so arrogant. And so finally I said, "Ma'am, what is your problem?" And she was—you know there in Ormoc I was always being accused of favoritism. I was always being dragged in the media. People would always tell me they would go to the media and I would have to tell them go, no problem, it's your right to go there, no problem...But I'm going to tell you we're also stressed *ha* at that time...And I had been explaining to her, but despite the lengthy explanation that I gave and letting her understand about the program, she cannot understand. And so finally I told her that ma'am, this I cannot forget, yes ma'am all of you are [victims] because she came from a very famous family in Ormoc...Since you claim that all of you are victims, all of you including everybody, yah, everybody, all the population of Ormoc are victims okay ma'am so I already explained to you that we have this process, we have the criteria, we only have this much, we cannot really afford to give it to everybody because this is only the amount that we raised, okay ma'am fine. But since you demanded for it and you said everybody is a victim and we just have to give everybody, that everybody deserves to be given, fine. Okay no problem...I will give to everyone regardless of whether they fall within the criteria or not. I'll give it to everybody. All population in Ormoc. So okay ma'am I'll just give you one nail. Because that's what the funds can only afford for all of you. Just one nail. Or just choose which one. One shingle, fine. But everybody can have one. Each one of you will have one...She left.<sup>536</sup>

Some pragmatic opportunists also managed to exploit a desperate situation that promised to provide personal material gains. In the midst of momentary chaos, looters in the city center were reported to “still [ply] their trade”<sup>537</sup> two days after the tragedy. Indeed, petty looting from corpses and establishments were common occurrences, although this had not attracted

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<sup>536</sup> Dominica Chua, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI), interview with the author, 29 July 2013, in Cebu City, original in English, transcribed by author.

<sup>537</sup> G. Dumat-ol, “It looked like a Nazi death camp,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 November 1991, 1 and 6.

widespread media attention at the time.<sup>538</sup> An isolated case of molesting the corpse of a woman, who had been washed naked into Barangay Linao, was also narrated.<sup>539</sup> Opportunists also raised prices of basic commodities, such as candles, which sold for seventy-five centavos before the flood but afterwards cost 1.50 pesos, while rice that had cost nine pesos was re-priced at twelve pesos a kilo.<sup>540</sup> But these cases were exceptional. Ormoc after the tragedy did not experience any breakdown in law and order as occurred in the case of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) and did not see a rise in criminality apart from some isolated cases of looting.<sup>541</sup> The flash flood did not necessarily result in the social chaos characterized by collective panic, a popular image of mass disaster.<sup>542</sup> Yet why was there no widespread

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<sup>538</sup> (1) Buboy, interview with author, 4 April 2013, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author: "Afterwards...for the first time in my life I did the crime that I never wanted to do, that is to steal. It's because you didn't have money. What happened was that others were also doing it I saw that so I also did it. Because we didn't have any, we were still alive and there were the dead who had money on them so there...we felt in all pockets and took their money...[Author: How much were you able to get?] I was able to get about 500 pesos from the pockets of the dead. Now they were swelling, growing bigger because they drowned, so we [gestures with hands as though holding a knife and slicing through something tough] destroyed their pants, ah we cut all their pockets off. The others were able to get [gestures towards the ring finger] [Author: Ring] rings! Yes...or earrings." (2) Elizabeth, interview with author, 6 April 2013, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: "When we were looking for my *pamangkin* [nephew/niece] at the seaside, [people] were collecting watches, earrings. I said how unfortunate were the dead, people still do this to them when they are already dead." (3) Ariel, interview with author, 6 July 2013, in Ormoc City, original in English, transcribed by author: "There were a lot of what do you call it? Maybe because of the panic that people are experiencing that time, they stole a lot of materials [Author: Ah so there was looting?] yah there's looting, there's stealing of food, appliances so you can see the effect of the flood to the people. So we keep on walking as a whole, together as a family, we see a lot of bodies appearing from left and right, everywhere, even some hang on a branch of a tree. So it was a very very sad time."

<sup>539</sup> Ronald Boy, interview with author, 21 April 2013, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author: "...we only saw one thing, that was our teacher in Nalunopan like she was still alive, she was put on something like she was taken advantaged of since we saw she wasn't...she was already clean [Author: She was dead?] she was still complete [?], isn't it in death [a corpse] is stiff but then she was newly [Author: Where was she found?] in Linao as though *istambays* (unemployed; loiterers) [took advantage of her]...*istambays* in Linao or Punta...they did something awful. [Nang Perlita: She was already dead but killed again] Her husband was compelled to say that his wife was already dead but they still did something awful to her. He saw that someone did something [Nang Perlita: Used]."

<sup>540</sup> E. Tordesillas, "Donations aren't reaching survivors," *Malaya*, 10 November 1991, 1&8. Also L. Jimenea, interview with author, 12 March 2013, in Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English. Prices, however, were reported stabilized two days after on November 12, according to Undersecretary Ernesto Ordoñez of the Department of Trade and Industry, cited in "Epidemic feared in Ormoc," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 12 November 1991, 1&14.

<sup>541</sup> Senior Police Officer (SPO) 2 Eduardo Betuin, interview with author, 15 July 2013, in Camp Downes, Ormoc City.

<sup>542</sup> On a discussion on the popular images of disaster behavior, see H. Rodriguez, E. Quarantelli and R. Dynes (eds), "Editors' Introduction," in *Handbook of Disaster Research* (Springer, 2006), xviii. Katz, in documenting the disaster of the 2010 Haiti earthquake,

disorder? Perusing the lengthy videos taken by JL Fotorama that day and subsequent days<sup>543</sup> and supported by interviews among survivors, why was there no shared panic or clamor for basic necessities like water and food? While the devastation had been horrific in the city center, the flood did not adversely affect sixty per cent of Ormoc City.<sup>544</sup> Majority of the casualties had also been low-income communities that had lived on the margins of the city for years prior to the tragedy, already rendered invisible by then. In addition, the Philippine Constabulary station in PP1 located in front of Saints Peter and Paul Parish Church in the downtown area had been inundated, as was the City Jail beside the fire station in the Government Center. But no jail inmates were killed because they were immediately evacuated to the roof as soon as the floodwaters rose. In fact, only one jailbreak case occurred as a result of the tragedy, and this was not picked up at all by the media.<sup>545</sup> A convict, who had been imprisoned at the Ormoc City jail a few months before the November 1991 flood for theft, escaped when he was among fifty jail inmates conscripted to shovel corpses from the city streets onto trucks to be taken to a mass grave.<sup>546</sup> Two or three days later, when the local government began to undertake clearing operations along the city streets, this man came upon a briefcase<sup>547</sup> that was stuffed with money. He casually

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argues that “social disintegration is a myth perpetuated by movies, fiction, and misguided journalism.” J. Katz, *The Big Truck that Went By, How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster*, 82.

<sup>543</sup> Untitled home videos. (Ormoc City, JL Photorama, 5-9 November 1991), DVD, accessed at the audio-visual room, Saint Peter’s College, Ormoc City, on 17 June 2013.

<sup>544</sup> E. Tordesillas et al., “Leyte death toll rises to 6,500,” *Malaya*, 8 November 1991, 1&3. This estimate is based on the figure provided then by the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), which said that seven barangays including Malbasag, Punta, Alegre, Isla Verde, Don Felipe and Mabini were submerged in water, accounting for about forty (40) percent of the city population.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid. Another jailbreak in Ormoc City commonly but mistakenly identified as a result of the 1991 tragedy involved the convicted criminal, Arnold Itang, who was arrested after a hold up attempt in Barrio Barangay Airport in Ormoc City. With his escape, Jail Warden SPO4 Celso Jementesa was convicted for six (6) years. Itang remains at large today. But this jailbreak actually occurred years after the 1991 flash flood.

<sup>546</sup> See, for example, A. Ilagan, “AFP gives up search; dead reach 6,000,” *Manila Bulletin*, 11 November 1991, 1 and 22; and, M. Duenas, “Tragedy in Ormoc: Killer flood,” *Philippine Free Press*, 23 November 1991, 4-5 and 21. The conscription of jail inmates was corroborated by SPO2 Eduardo Betuin of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Camp Downes, Ormoc City, and SPO4 (Ret) Cañete. This unnamed convict was allegedly a driver for a Police Constabulary major in Manila prior to incarceration, before being contracted by a gang of criminals to drive a jeepney to Leyte carrying stolen goods.

<sup>547</sup> This briefcase was thought to have been owned by a Mr. Baltonado, who was driving his red pickup in the morning of 5 November 1991 across a bridge into the city and was swept

picked it up, opened it, and without further thought, boarded a passing water delivery truck and was never heard of again to this day.<sup>548</sup> Most of those who had been conscripted to help in the recovery and burial of bodies went back, willingly enough, to their jail cells.<sup>549</sup> No Police Constabulary officers were also killed or injured while on duty, although two officers lost members of their families to the flood. Police Constabulary (PC) Bienvenido Udtohan lost his wife and two small children, along with his parents-in-law, who all remain missing until today, while PC Marguez lost a son, who is also still missing.<sup>550</sup> What was more common were stories of survivors picking up a diverse range of things—television sets, bags containing jewellery and money, household furniture, live pigs, and *santos*<sup>551</sup>—scattered about for the taking. More importantly, the norm was kindness and heroism, oftentimes of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.<sup>552</sup> One such story ran thus:

He was playing in the yard when suddenly a neighbour who heard the onrushing water grabbed my little boy, whom he thought was his son. He commanded him to entwine his arms tightly around his neck, as

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away by the flash flood. Mrs Sescon, interview with author, 4 October 2013, at Saint Peter's College, Ormoc City.

<sup>548</sup> SPO4 (Ret) Cañete, interview with author, 7 October 2013, in PNP Retirees Area, Barangay San Roque, Ormoc City.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> (1) SPO4 (Ret) Cañete, interview with author, 7 October 2013, in PNP Retirees Area, Barangay San Roque, Ormoc City; (2) Police Constabulary (Ret) Bienvenido Udtohan, interview with author, 15 July 2013, in Barangay San Lorenzo, Ormoc City.

<sup>551</sup> Bisaya, lit. images of saints.

<sup>552</sup> For example, Buboy, interview with author, 4 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author: "There are actually many...stories of heroism. In one site there were many because there were more victims there. But I can quote with my own wife, the two of us. Because there was a baby that we saved who was floating, wrapped in cellophane [touches a white cellophane bag in a corner of the room], with cloth and cellophane, who was just barely alive...Now I think he was only three months old. Now...my wife was lactating so it's between...giving milk to her baby or this baby that we found. Now I told my wife, go ahead and share your milk. I knew that the other baby must be very hungry, it was unconscious, almost dead, we didn't know who owned him, who the mother was...Now [my wife] nursed him and she was so scared because it was our first baby and it was her first time to nurse a baby who was not her own and the other baby's lips were so cold [smiles] because he nearly died. So...to make it short the baby lived and his grandmother showed up, she looked for him, she was crying, the baby was alive so we turned him over to the grandmother...You know what because my wife became a teacher in Prep [Preparatory school prior to elementary]. One time my wife said there was a child who always stared at her and she felt very close to the mother. But [my wife] was already questioning...she didn't think about it. She was questioning because she felt close to the child and the mother, though she didn't know it was actually the grandmother. Until one time I went there and I was the operator of their sound system for one activity, and there the grandmother opened up, *sus* it was one celebration of tears."

he, the man was climbing up a nearby tree. In a while, feeling, (sic) that the little boy at his back was slipping down, loosening his grip, he snatched him and held him to his chest. That was when the man realized; the little boy was not his son...He saved my son, but not his family.<sup>553</sup>

## Relief, relocation and recovery

Mayor Victoria Locsin, whose residence in downtown Ormoc was not inundated, called for a meeting immediately after the floods subsided and began organizing her staff in the afternoon of 5 November, minus her vice mayor Nepomuceno Aparis I, who reported for duty only in the evening of the same day.<sup>554</sup> Some pockets of the city had already received the first batch of relief that same evening.<sup>555</sup> Others less fortunate were able to get relief a few days after or only a week or two weeks after the flood.<sup>556</sup> Barangay Nalunopan<sup>557</sup>, for instance, which was only about five kilometres from the city center, received relief aid only after two weeks.

What had been much publicized, however, was the role in organizing and coordinating relief of a relatively unknown family. With power and

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<sup>553</sup> Cited in M. Lotilla-Asencio, "Divine Mercy for two houses in the Ormoc City tragedy," *Miracles of the Divine Mercy* (Undated) (Online).

<sup>554</sup> Local journalist, anonymous, interview with author, 12 March 2013, in Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English. According to the journalist, Mayor Locsin sent someone to look for Vice Mayor Aparis, who was 'missing in action' at the height of the crisis. When the latter finally came to the City Hall, Mayor Locsin allegedly berated Aparis, who in turn replied that he was also a victim of the flood and had to attend to his family first before other people. It was this exchange that allegedly later soured the relationship between Mayor Locsin and Vice Mayor Aparis, culminating in the latter jumping ship from Locsin's political party to the Codilla's after 1991.

<sup>555</sup> See, for example, (1) Esterlita, a resident of badly hit barangay Don Felipe, interview with author, 16 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, when asked if she remembers her family having something to eat on the night of 5 November 1991, transcribed and translated by author: "Of course! We had *pusô* at the City High [referring to the Ormoc City High School, which was used as an evacuation center]. Then candles and matches and small lamps as there was no electricity. [Author: That was good because others had to go hungry for two, three days] No ma'am. The next day ma'am we were given *kaldero* ma'am and box stove. That was it. We didn't go hungry during that flood." (2) Solemnisa, an Isla Verde resident, interview with author, 5 April 1991, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, when asked the same question, transcribed and translated by author: "I always got something...It was very immediate. There were a lot given away."

<sup>556</sup> (1) Ronald Boy, interview with author, 21 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, who claim to have gotten rations a week after; and, (2) Buboy, interview with author, 4 April 1991, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino, who first got the US combat ration foodstuff five days after the flood.

<sup>557</sup> Pseudonym.



communication lines down, it was serendipitous that Gwendolyn Garcia, daughter of former Cebu Governor Pablo Garcia and Ormoc-born Judge Esperanza “Inday” Fiel and married to Eufrocino ‘Winnie’ Codilla, Jr., owned a hand-held radio, which she used to call for help to Cebu.<sup>558</sup> By 6 November, the Cebu provincial government responded rapidly, with Governor Emilio Osmeña bringing a handsome batch of relief goods by helicopter. A little known relief effort was that spearheaded by the municipality of Baybay mayor, Carmen Cari, on the afternoon of 5 November, who brought the first batch of water, *pusô*<sup>559</sup> and roasted chicken to the Ormoc City Hall where some employees had already gathered.<sup>560</sup> She came with a team in a pump boat via Ormoc Bay and left around 8 p.m., afraid that a *panlimpyo sa Danita*<sup>561</sup> would sweep through the city again, which according to local superstitions commonly occurred to clean up any remaining debris brought by a major flood.<sup>562</sup>

The next day, the Regional Disaster Coordinating Council (RDCC), in consultation with a largely non-operational City Disaster Coordinating Council (CDCC), prioritized the recovery of corpses, prevention of further casualties, provision of emergency medical services, and the organization of food assistance to all victims.<sup>563</sup> The first two truckloads of relief supplies organized by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) left Tacloban City in the afternoon of the same day.<sup>564</sup> By 7 November, the first batch of DSWD reinforcement staff arrived in Ormoc City consisting of fifteen personnel from the Regional Office and neighboring provincial offices, a practice that would continue daily until 30 November.<sup>565</sup> Relief goods from

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<sup>558</sup> K. Navarro, “Meet Cebu’s defiant governor,” *Newsbreak, Rappler*, 19 December 2012 (Online).

<sup>559</sup> Bisaya, lit. steamed rice cooked inside a triangular-shaped woven coconut leaf wrapper.

<sup>560</sup> L. Jimenea, interview with author, 12 March 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino.

<sup>561</sup> *Panlimpyo sa dalita*, according to Lalaine Jimenea—long-time Ormoc resident, survivor of the 1991 Ormoc flood, and the only one who said anything about this term—literally refers to a smaller flood that is believed to follow a major one, with the sole purpose of ‘cleansing’ the debris left behind by the bigger and more destructive flood. However, no other respondent corroborated this term.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> C. De Leon and L. Laigo, “Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc: Experience and insights of administrators,” *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* Vol. 37 No. 4 (University of the Philippines, 1993), 327-335.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

Cebu also began to arrive. On this day as well, the DSWD, Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), and Office of Civil Defense (OCD) released separate estimates of casualties.<sup>566</sup> Meanwhile, UNDRO began issuing regular monitoring reports, noting that “[n]o international appeal [had] been requested by the [Philippine] government at this stage.” This would change on 8 November, when the Philippines finally broadcast an international appeal for food supplies, especially pre-packed food rations, blankets and plastic sheeting, medicines and disinfectant (including antibiotics and anti-tetanus drugs, as well as the compound formalin for the preservation of corpses for burial), water purification tablets, generators and fuel, heavy equipment to extract bodies and remove debris, and for the restoration of damaged infrastructure, especially roads.<sup>567</sup> The Philippine government also requested from UNDRO emergency teams with experience in relief coordination and flood management “in order to assist with appraisal of needs and coordination of response.”<sup>568</sup> At this early stage, the scarcity of skilled manpower in disaster response was identified as crucially lacking, indeed it was an “eye opener” for the DSWD, because though “considerable efforts and resources...[had already been] spent over the years to build-up the capacity of local communities for disaster management, much still remains to be done.”<sup>569</sup> Ironically, the DSWD had conducted eighteen intensive disaster management workshops at national and regional levels from 1987 to 1992 to train an average of 66,000 individuals annually at numerous barangay-level workshops.<sup>570</sup>

UNDRO’s final aid tally for Typhoon Uring victims amounted to \$5.8 million (or approximately 1.55 billion pesos), excluding contributions in kind that had no declared value and those that had not been channelled through UNDRO, amounting to at least \$250,000 (or approximately 6,667,500 pesos). This amount also did not include donations made by fellow Filipinos, both individuals and corporations, in both cash and kind amounting to at

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<sup>566</sup> See, for instance, L. Lacson and N. Abrematea, “‘Uring’ kills 2,122 in Leyte, renders 200,000 homeless”; and, C. Velarde, et al., “‘Uring’ kills 2,122 in Leyte, renders 200,000 homeless.”

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> C. De Leon and L. Laigo, “Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc,” 327-328.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

least \$240,720 (approximately 6,420,000 pesos). Much of the amount pledged by countries, however, was directed, not to the government, but to non-government organizations (NGOs).<sup>571</sup> It is unclear today how much of this amount simply remained as pledges. After twenty-two years, there are no existing records that documented how this money had been received and how exactly it had been used.<sup>572</sup> Nonetheless, some international donors in November 1991 had expressed donor fatigue in view of the successive appeals made by the Philippine government for additional support for the rehabilitation of areas stricken by numerous recent disasters.<sup>573</sup> In response, the national government through Finance Secretary Jesus Estanislao announced a so-called shift in focus on aid use from “seeking more financial help from donor countries to formulating a concrete program directed towards the rehabilitation of areas devastated by recent disasters, particularly Mt. Pinatubo’s eruptions and the flash floods in Leyte.”<sup>574</sup> Contrary to the expressed atmosphere of fatigue among donors, however, Japan vowed to give more.<sup>575</sup> Some newspaper editorials later insisted that Japan must “shoulder some blame as the world’s biggest importer of tropical timber” and that “70% of timber logged in the Philippines went to Japan, and logging was the cause of the [Ormoc] disaster.”<sup>576</sup>

Based on news reports, various national government agencies released several tranches of aid for typhoon Uring relief operations, namely: one million pesos from the DSWD for relief assistance to department offices

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<sup>571</sup> This was also the case observed in Haiti. Katz found that only about nine (9) percent of the \$683 million given by donors in 2007 to Haiti for development went directly to the Haitian government as budget support. The majority, between \$307 million and \$604 million, went to fund non-government organizations and foreign private contractors who “may have delivered some of that money to Haiti in the form of local subcontracts, or material, or not at all.” What was disturbing was that “large quantities were spent on short-term fixes, such as free food, and supplies whose purchase benefited suppliers and corporations in the donors’ home countries, not Haiti.” J. Katz, *The Big Truck that Went By, How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster*, 10.

<sup>572</sup> Again, Katz observes that, in the case of Haiti, “Donors made it difficult to track where aid went and how it got spent.” *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>573</sup> T. Valderrama, “Gov’t shifts focus on aid use: Estanislao,” *Philippine Times Journal*, 15 November 1991, 5.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>576</sup> Cited in “Ormoc floods prick Japan’s conscience,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 November 1991, 6.

in Eastern Visayas,<sup>577</sup> seven (7) million pesos to Northern Leyte (with 5 million pesos specifically for the rehabilitation of Ormoc's waterworks) sourced from the Calamity Fund of the President,<sup>578</sup> an additional twenty-four (24) million pesos from the Calamity Fund (where 20 million pesos went to the DSWD, one million pesos to the Department of Health [DOH], two million pesos to the Negros Occidental local government, 500,000 pesos to La Carlota City, and 500,000 pesos to Bago City),<sup>579</sup> fourteen (14) million pesos from the President's Social Fund,<sup>580</sup> and eleven (11) million pesos from the Philippine Coconut Authority through the Leyte Economic Forum for the rehabilitation of affected coconut farmers.<sup>581</sup> President Aquino also directed the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) to allocate fifty (50) million pesos for an estimated 5,000 families with dead or missing family members in Eastern Visayas.<sup>582</sup> It is unclear, however, if the government fully achieved its promise "to use all of its Php100 million Calamity Fund to speed up delivery of relief goods, medicines, emergency shelter materials, and other forms of assistance to towns and cities devastated by Uring...to avert hunger and epidemics," an announcement made early on 9 November.<sup>583</sup> In November 1992, exactly a year after, newly elected Vice Mayor Benjamin Tugonon stated in a news article that the previous Locsin administration received twenty-two (22) million pesos in aid, but that only 1.8 million pesos was left. "Our main problem," he noted, "is consolidating all

<sup>577</sup> "Aquino visits Ormoc today," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 November 1991, 1&13.

<sup>578</sup> The Calamity Fund totalled 1 billion pesos for a fiscal year, which according to Secretary Guillermo Carague, still had a balance of 227.6 million pesos on 15 November 1991. See "Identification of victims delaying P10T burial fund," *Malaya*, 15 November 1991, 1&2; "Aquino visits Ormoc today," *Ibid.*; and, V. Batic, "Where's aid money? Ormoc City Mayor asks," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 17 November 1991, 1&13.

<sup>579</sup> "Cory denies diversion of relief goods," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 November 1991, 1&10; and, "Identification of victims delaying P10T burial aid," *Malaya*.

<sup>580</sup> "Aquino visits Leyte, vows more government aid," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 November 1991, 1&8; and, V. Batic, "Where's aid money? Ormoc City Mayor asks," *Ibid.* However, there were reports that Mrs. Aquino promised 40 million pesos, rather than 14 million pesos from her social fund to be made available immediately for the reconstruction of bridges. C. Estrella, "Cory hands out P10,000 each to fatalities' kin," *Malaya*, 11 November 1991, 1&2.

<sup>581</sup> V. Batic, "Where's aid money? Ormoc City Mayor asks," *Ibid.*

<sup>582</sup> It is unclear whether this amount funded the President's Social Fund and/or the Calamity Fund released for the relief operations. C. Velarde and C. Estrella, "18 families get burial assistance," *Malaya*, 16 November 1991, 2.

<sup>583</sup> F. Lobo, "Death toll passes 3,000; still rising," *Manila Bulletin*, 9 November 1991, 1&20.

records of (disbursements and donations). We are trying to retrieve whatever records [exist] before, during, and after the floods.”<sup>584</sup>

With Ormoc apparently awash with funding, relief operations spearheaded by the government were far from smooth and efficient. The major players during the relief and rehabilitation stage were the regional DSWD, Ormoc City government, the Catholic church primarily the Archdiocese of Palo where Ormoc belonged, the Cebu provincial government, foreign donors especially the US and Japan as the most visible, print and television media groups, PNRC, and NGOs reported in the media, including Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI), World Vision, and PhilRads, among others. Unrecorded, the role of the Philippine Constabulary (PC) was also fundamental, as soldiers provided the much-needed manpower in the clearing up operations and in ensuring that survivors did not return to the riverbanks.

In the first week after the tragedy, relief was focused on the delivery of basic needs—food, clothes, blankets and beddings, tents, cooking utensils, and medicines.<sup>585</sup> Other forms of aid included cash donations specifically to families who had lost some of their loved ones, provision of heavy equipment like trucks and bulldozers, training of staff on the technical aspects of relief operations, disaster management and psychological counselling, and provision of medical and other volunteer services.<sup>586</sup> The Tent City, the biggest project spearheaded by the Ormoc local government under the leadership of mayor Victoria Locsin, was immediately established to facilitate the transfer and management of evacuees, a project that came with heavy funding.<sup>587</sup> It was a five-hectare site located in Barangay San Isidro, an area still within the city center but at a higher elevation, identified by the local government for emergency settlement to house about 700 families at an estimated cost of \$1 million, so named after the numerous donated white tents.

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<sup>584</sup> Cited in E. Tordesillas, “Ormoc: A year after; lessons learned, lessons ignored,” *Malaya*, 3 November 1992, 1&10.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

<sup>587</sup> Reliefweb, Ibid.

Dominica Chua, who oversaw relief operations for Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI) in Ormoc in 1991, an NGO involved primarily in the setting up of starter or relief houses and the conduct of psycho-social programs among survivors,<sup>588</sup> remembers her frustration in finalizing the relocation program in Ormoc. RAFI had received funding from international donors for specific relief activities, notably the construction of starter houses, the conduct of psychosocial therapy, and repair of the damaged easements along Tambulilid, with an implementation timeframe of 120 days.<sup>589</sup>

**Dominica Chua:** In fact I told City Hall, we will handle everything for you, just give me the relocation site...Just focus on your job there. We will handle it. I only need your City Planning Officer just to help me grid the Tambulilid because they pointed it out already, because I will tell you it was a swamp *ha*.

**Author:** Yes it's a basin as well.

**Chua:** My Jesus Christ! My God, why are they putting it there? But who am I to say no? My job was only to put people in Tent City there. My God, what will I do with this, it's *kanipaan*,<sup>590</sup> you have all the palms you know in one part there, and there's water. What will I do? Who's gonna go to help me fill up the land? And who's going to help me grid it? Because, you know, in my list I have to put all those people, the neighborhood, I have to maintain the neighborhood. I have to maintain that those coming from Don Felipe has to be together with the Don Felipe.

**Author:** Ah so it was followed? That kind of policy?

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<sup>588</sup> D. Chua, interview with author, 29 July 2013, in Cebu City, remarks on these starter houses, original in English, transcribed by author: "I would like to emphasize it. It was relief housing. It was a starter house. Don't call it low cost housing because it was very different...[Author: What is a starting (sic) house, ma'am?] It's just a very simple one. All you have to do is just like the normal *nipa* hut, like they were given...each one of them will have a 30 square meters or 50 square meters and the house which was around 20 plus or 30 square meters."

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Bisaya, lit. place where palm trees proliferated.

**Chua:** Yah! Yah! You cannot mix them up! They're coming from different places! So you cannot! You have to maintain the neighborhood, my dear!...Okay and so you have *pa gyud* all these other institutions that are also doing their own relief, who's trying to mess up with my data, who and some of... these people here would say, "Oh no...you're late, you're delayed okay so we just go to this institution because now they are going to be ready"...When there's a lack of collaboration amongst relief intervenors it is always a mess...That should be the role of the LGU<sup>591</sup>, really has to, should surface, and they should be the one coordinating all of these relief."<sup>592</sup>

According to the Ormoc City Social Welfare and Development Office, a total of 1,801 beneficiary families were resettled in various areas of Ormoc. This was below the figure reported early in 1992 whereby 2,668 Ormoc families were planned for relocation in several hectares purchased with donations from private organizations and the UN Development Fund (UNDP).<sup>593</sup> However, discouraging people from returning to the riverbanks where their houses used to stand was difficult. "[T]hey have been hard-hearted," said Dr. Gregorio Yrastorza, Jr., Ormoc councillor and the chair of the City Disaster Coordinating Council (CDCC), "But you also can't tell them to leave if you don't have an alternative yet for families living in high-risk areas."<sup>594</sup> The relocation program itself was bogged down by problems, including landowners raising the price of land at the last minute. Another issue was the seeming unconcern displayed by survivors themselves who tempered their horrific experiences with self-assurance that it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. "What happened here was a *buhawi* (whirlwind)," said Jimmy Castillo, a resident of Isla Verde. "It was very rare. It never happened here before, and it won't happen again."<sup>595</sup> Another common complaint was that, "The resettlement site is too small and too crowded," said Alfred

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<sup>591</sup> Local Government Unit.

<sup>592</sup> D. Chua, interview with author, Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> H. Severino, "Ormoc revisited," Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Cited in Severino, Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Cited in Severino, Ibid.

Casicas, who went back to reside in the area of Isla Verde with his family immediately after the tragedy.<sup>596</sup>

Another telling challenge was the aloof personality cultivated by a mayor who had since the flood practiced a leadership style not easily accessible to the public, preferring instead to allow subordinates to screen those who came to see her.<sup>597</sup> Many perceived this style of behavior as natural to someone borne to wealth and far removed from the daily concerns of the ordinary world around her. But, at the crucial moment, in an effort to deal with the devastation of the urban flooding, the mayor was unable to unify all those disparate organizations and groups to ensure optimal utilization of aid resources:

Whenever the mayor will call for a meeting, I see only one or two representative will go there, but they make arrangements with the mayor individually, but the mayor seems not...She should have been here on top, but she's not on top.<sup>598</sup>

Worse still, she was said to have briefly left Ormoc in the second week of December 1991 to attend the graduation of one of her children studying in the US.<sup>599</sup> Problems in Ormoc multiplied, which included the slow receipt of information that hampered planning and decision-making; misunderstanding and conflict between the DSWD and the city government; logistical concerns over actual distribution of goods, including the lack of gasoline and equipment;<sup>600</sup> the relative inexperience of DSWD regular and replacement staff in the management of large-scale food distribution networks in evacuation centers; and, poor coordination with other agencies engaged in disaster operations.<sup>601</sup> That the local government was so incapacitated was an understatement. Indeed, "bureaucracy failure" was argued to be the "major impediment to relief work and rehabilitation efforts" in

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<sup>596</sup> Cited in H. Severino, "Ormoc tragedy: Stage set for a repeat."

<sup>597</sup> Informal conversations with Ormocanons, February-October 2013, in Ormoc City.

<sup>598</sup> NGO worker, name withheld upon request, interview with author, 29 July 2013, in Cebu City, original in English.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> E. Tordesillas, "No more tears to shed," *Malaya*, 8 November 1991, 1 & 3.

<sup>601</sup> C. De Leon and L. Laigo, "Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc," 330.



Ormoc in 1991.<sup>602</sup> In a study involving twenty-three key informants representing twenty-two government, NGO and church-based organizations involved in the relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc after the 1991 flood, opinions were split on which agency stood out in the process. Half of the respondents remarked that not one particular agency was exceptional while another half perceived the Cebu provincial government as a notable exception.<sup>603</sup> Bureaucracy hampered food distribution at every stage and accusations about hoarding and fund diversion were levelled against local officials all the way up to the President.<sup>604</sup> But stockpiled relief packs were confirmed rotting in warehouses, an accusation denied by both local and national government officials.<sup>605</sup> The national government's solution was the installation of two telecommunications circuits ostensibly to ensure a direct communication link between Manila and Ormoc City.<sup>606</sup> Malacañang also released Memorandum Circular Number 139 on 19 November 1991 providing guidelines to ensure that the flow of goods and humanitarian services was not hampered and should not be suspended by more than three days.<sup>607</sup> The image that appears was a lack of a strategic approach and chaos—not among traumatized survivors fighting amongst themselves out of fear and suspicion—but rather among relief responders afflicted by a leadership vacuum, as the local government was rendered virtually paralysed. Several NGOs, eager to sidestep politics and red tape, decided to launch Operation Noah's Ark. According to Socorro Gasco, dean of the Divine Word University School of Nursing in Tacloban City, "This might be the only way to make sure that our offer of assistance reaches those who

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<sup>602</sup> M.C. Conaco et al., "Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc: Experiences and insights of field workers and beneficiaries," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* Vol. 37 No. 4 (Quezon City: University of the Philippines 1993), 336-350; and, E. Tordesillas, "Donations aren't reaching survivors," *Malaya*, 10 November 1991, 1&8.

<sup>603</sup> This observation was shared by De Leon and Laigo, who note that, "The quick and sustained response from Cebu was a notable observation." C. De Leon and L. Laigo, "Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc," 330.

<sup>604</sup> "No cholera epidemic," *Ibid.*; "Cory denies diversion of relief goods," *Ibid.*; and, T. Cruz, "Palace denies diversion of relief, but admits lack of coordination," *Philippine Times Journal*, 15 November 1991, 1&6.

<sup>605</sup> "Relief food packs rotting in Ormoc," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 16 November 1991, 1.

<sup>606</sup> T. Cruz, "Malacanang issues memo on relief goods delivery," *Philippine Times Journal*, 24 November 1991, 3.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*

really need it most.”<sup>608</sup> The Catholic Church was a central player in Operation Noah’s Ark, with the distribution center at Saints Peter and Paul Parish. The Iglesia Ni Cristo, which had lost twenty-three members to the flood and had fourteen homeless families in Isla Verde, Malbasag and along the riverbanks, conducted its own relief operations for one month, called *Lingap Sa Mamamayan* (Relief for the People), with estimated beneficiaries reaching approximately 3,000 individuals.<sup>609</sup> To each its own, this appeared to be how relief organizations went about their operations then.

While assistance was not based on religious affiliation, families and communities with links to external groups were more likely to have guaranteed assistance. Barangay officials also played a critical role in identifying who should receive much-needed aid, as one survivor attests:

**Mrs. Sescon:** We were very thankful that many helped us so we were able to also spread the relief we got. Her housemate [referring to a colleague sitting nearby who was also a survivor] was my assistant. She retired about two years ago. She said they did not have anything to eat, my God.

**Author:** What happened to those who were just boarders?

**Sescon:** That’s it. Her housemate was very angry because they did not get anything as they were just boarders. I said how are you going to eat if you aren’t given anything?

**Author:** So how were they able to eat then?

**Sescon:** No, it depended on the barangay captain, the barangay officials. Because in our district, even if you were only a renter, as long as in this house, in here, in one house, how many are you here? Who is the head of the family? It wasn’t per person. It was per head of the family. We were four families, how many children do you have? That was my style in questioning them because at that time I was the

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<sup>608</sup> D. Petilla, “NGOs launch Operation Noah’s Ark,” Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> As cited in a handwritten note from Fernando Villanueva, legal officer and minister of the Iglesia ni Cristo in Ormoc City, 7 June 2013.

barangay treasurer. How many families are you? How many children do you have? Four, you three, you one so we compute that this is what you will get. Some of them went to our house. We shared with them. Because we got a lot from personal sources. My husband's relatives really came here...When you have so much you have to share.<sup>610</sup>

In comparison, for example, some 30,000 cultural minorities belonging to the Manobo and Bagobo tribes in the hinterlands of Samar and Leyte were also badly affected by typhoon Uring. But because they were not as well connected to the outside world, aid sent to them was much slower.<sup>611</sup>

### **Creative coping and self-help**

Coping is defined as adaptive actions and mechanisms to solve problems brought by “unusual, abnormal and adverse situations.”<sup>612</sup> In Ormoc amidst the bureaucratic challenges associated with relief operations, some enterprising survivors organized themselves into an NGO called *Pagtinabangay* (Help Each Other) Foundation in order to safeguard the continuous supply of rice. Headed by Emil Justimbaste<sup>613</sup> as executive director, *Pagtinabangay* arranged for the purchase of sacks of rice from farmer groups on consignment and sold them for a profit of thirty pesos per *cavan* to Ormoc residents.<sup>614</sup>

From the national government, a family of six persons were initially provided with one kilo of rice and a can of sardines.<sup>615</sup> There were queues for everything: food, water, clothes, medicines, and the 10,000 pesos burial assistance promised by the President for those who had lost members of

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<sup>610</sup> Mrs. Sescon, interview with author, 4 October 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino.

<sup>611</sup> There was in fact only one news article on this. See “Tribal chieftain seek calamity aid for Uring-hit ethnic villages,” *Philippine Times Journal*, 26 November 1991, 15.

<sup>612</sup> B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon, and I. Davis (eds), *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Natural Disasters*, 112-114.

<sup>613</sup> Emil Justimbaste is currently known as *de facto* historian of Ormoc City, having written “A brief history of Ormoc” for the *Mithi Og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, a “learning resource material” compiled by the Department of Education (DepEd) Region VIII. He was also a journalist.

<sup>614</sup> “Ormocanons handle own relief, rehab programs,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 23 November 1991, 6. *Cavan*, Filipino, lit. measure of *palay*, a sack.

<sup>615</sup> G. Dumat-ol, “Leyte death toll reaches 3,700,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 November 1991, 1&12.

their family. People lined up for the handouts, even those who were not, in reality, victims. In the immediate aftermath of the flood, operations provided relief not only to those immediately vulnerable groups, but also to the long-standing marginalized communities of Ormoc, without exception and irrespective of whether they were disaster victims or not.<sup>616</sup> For many survivors, it was undoubtedly a time that demanded an attitude of wily and street-smart self-help, almost a necessity to grab a perceived advantage lest they were left behind, an attitude that reflected a deep abiding interest in ensuring their own family's survival that no one else except themselves might uphold. It was an attitude of calculated self-interest, prevalent among urban poor communities,<sup>617</sup> and it was undeniably present in the aftermath of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy. According to Police Officer (Retired) Pocson, who was residing in devastated barangay Don Felipe in 1991, the talk show host Inday Badiday came and distributed goods to the neighborhood one day and he was shocked at what he saw. He knew that everyone had already amassed small piles of canned goods at home because relief goods had been regularly distributed, but still they fought over those goods as though they were dying of hunger. It shamed him, he said, that he asked Inday Badiday to leave with the goods and give to somewhere else.<sup>618</sup>

The proliferation of particular disaster stories also showed not only what survivors considered as essential values, but also more importantly how they viewed the world around them, especially as it fell apart. In Tent City where the majority of survivors were initially put up, survival stories assumed the character of miracles, indicating a need to believe in the powers of an all-powerful God vis-à-vis the impotence of men and women in

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<sup>616</sup> See, for example, Divina and Marife (neighbors), separate interviews with author, 5 April 2013, both in Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya. Both of them already resided in Tambulilid, which was not affected by the flood in 1991, but both received relief food that time.

<sup>617</sup> For a discussion of slum behavior, see, M. Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London and New York: Verso, 2006); also F. Landa Jocano, *Slum as a Way of Life: A Study of Coping Behavior in an Urban Environment* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1975). Racelis, however, criticizes Jocano's *Slum as a Way of Life* for its over-emphasis on deviant behaviors and the use of a predominantly male perspective, reinforcing many unfavourable stereotypes of slum communities, ignoring quantitative methodologies like survey, its failure to build on local and foreign literature on slums, and its failure to add to social science theory and policy formulation. See M. Racelis Hollnsteiner, "Review of *Slum as a Way of Life*," *Philippine Studies* Vol 24 No. 2 (Ateneo de Manila University, 1976), 234-237.

<sup>618</sup> Police Officer (Ret) Pocson, interview with author, 10 October 2013, in Ormoc City.

matters of life and death. Children, for example, were seen wearing rosaries on their necks,<sup>619</sup> while mothers told of how the Santo Niño, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ had performed feats that defied logic. In one documented story, two small *nipa* huts located along the Anilao riverbanks and their residents were spared, against all odds:

...Jesus, the Divine Mercy has been very merciful to us. The water came rushing, but they spared our houses. We were also flooded but up to the knee only.<sup>620</sup>

In another account, Papenuncia, a 73-year old widow who now lived in one of the resettlement barangays around the city, strongly believed that the survival of her *pawud*<sup>621</sup> house located in Barangay Alegria right beside the Anilao River could only be explained by divine intervention:

When the flood rose, our house also rose. When we went back, thank God, because the other year we were burnt down near the bridge! Our house was burnt down and we were not able to save a single thing. Everything was burnt. I said this time Lord please spare us because we did not have any more things! Or let our things go with the house if it is swept away. We will not have a house.<sup>622</sup>

As a consequence, there was an outpouring of religious fervor and the observance of ritual practices after 5 November 1991, in particular the *prusisyon*<sup>623</sup> three weeks after the tragedy<sup>624</sup> attended by thousands of

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<sup>619</sup> C. Estrella, "Life goes on: Laundry lines riverbanks; bodies float in midstream," *Malaya*, 11 November 1991, 13.

<sup>620</sup> Asencio, however, erroneously identify the "dreadful flash flood [that] destroyed countless houses and killed more than eleven thousand people in Ormoc City, in the Province of Leyte, Philippines," as occurring in 1992. M. Lotilla-Asencio, "Divine Mercy for two houses in the Ormoc City tragedy," *Miracles of the Divine Mercy* (Undated), Unpublished. The story was confirmed by Monsignor Jaime Villanueva, in an interview with the author, 30 August 2013, at the Burauen Parish Church, Municipality of Burauen, Leyte province.

<sup>621</sup> Bisaya, lit. palm-thatched.

<sup>622</sup> Papenuncia, interview with author, 16 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino. The extraordinary story became so sensational that she and her husband were subsequently interviewed by the ABS-CBN, a television network, immediately after the flash flood.

<sup>623</sup> Filipino, lit., procession of saints, commonly observed as a religious activity during the *Semana Santa* or Holy week, and during the *fiestas* or feast days of patron saints adopted by cities or municipalities.

<sup>624</sup> Masses were suspended indefinitely because, according to Monsignor Villanueva, "The Church was empty, the Church was full of mud, and the first mass was in the grotto...outside

survivor-devotees. Monsignor Jaime Villanueva, who was the parish priest in Ormoc in 1991, observed,

**Monsignor Villanueva:** They [Ormocanons] became more religious. In fact...you will see Ormoc with many people doing this *aurora*<sup>625</sup> this long procession, groups of them, they're meeting [in] the streets by their own, and like, for example, in Isla Verde, before the flood, very few come to the chapel to mass...so usually the one who goes to mass, good if there are five adults, most of them are children. But after, the chapel was destroyed. We shared mass under open air. There was one under a makeshift...tent...many people came and you know what was surprising, before, during the *kolekta*<sup>626</sup> time, we would use this *platito*<sup>627</sup> for the collection, but after the flash flood...they used this *nigo*.<sup>628</sup>

**Author:** The *nigo* was full!

**Villanueva:** Yes! That was surprising, they had no more money.<sup>629</sup>

Nonetheless, this extraordinary outward show of piety was only momentary, and Church attendance rates eventually declined as months and then years passed.<sup>630</sup> Indeed, the role of the Church in providing comfort and moral strength in the aftermath of the tragedy was critical. While the Parish Church of Saints Peter and Paul in the downtown area had been physically devastated, it was Monsignor Jaime Villanueva, two priests and a seminarian who conducted blessings of the dead before the corpses were brought by dump truck to the mass grave.<sup>631</sup> It was the Church, and God, that people

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the Church there was a grotto, Our Lady of Lourdes...within the compound...so that's where we had the mass...because the Church was full of mud and there were no pews yet."

<sup>625</sup> Filipino, lit., a procession of the image/s of the Blessed Virgin Mary, commonly practiced in the Philippines with an accompaniment of songs and prayers.

<sup>626</sup> Filipino, lit., collection of alms during the offertory of the mass.

<sup>627</sup> Filipino, lit., small plate.

<sup>628</sup> Filipino, lit., a shallow palm-woven basket for cleaning uncooked rice.

<sup>629</sup> Monsignor Jaime Villanueva, interview with author, 30 August 2013, in the Municipality of Burauen, Leyte, original in English.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> Arnel Genobiagon, former seminarian at the Saints Peter and Paul Parish Church, interview with author, 7 September 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino. Mr. Genobiagon and another priest were the only ones in the convent located in the Saints Peter and Paul

looked to in their misery and deep uncertainty, to give sense and meaning to such horror. For Monsignor Villanueva,

...the disaster [wa]s a sign that men should be reunited with God as they have already forgotten Him as they are engaged in mundane activities.<sup>632</sup>

In response, for those who survived, the process of understanding the arbitrariness of their existence in the midst of thousands who had died led to many feeling a need to renew their faith and to commit to become better persons. For many, the experience of watching loved ones perish brought strong feelings of guilt, powerlessness, self-blaming and depression, symptoms indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Yet, while there had been teams of psychologists who undertook stress debriefing therapy sessions among survivors, many more were left to cope on their own.<sup>633</sup> In a study undertaken forty-one months after the November 1991 tragedy involving 296 respondents consisting of 199 adults aged between twenty-one and fifty-five years and 97 children aged between eight and thirteen years residing in Barangay Tambulilid, the biggest relocation site in Ormoc City, it was found that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) persisted as psychological adjustment issues months after the tragedy.<sup>634</sup> Measures of psychological adjustment included feelings of well-being/satisfaction, frequency of thinking about the event, vividness of memories, reactions to intrusive memories of the trauma, future outlook (including worries and plans), perceived changes related to behavior,

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Parish Church on 5 November 1991 because Monsignor Villanueva was in Cebu City for a retreat.

<sup>632</sup> A.M. Pamintuan, "Cory visits Ormoc City, allots P21 M for repair," *Philippine Star*, 11 November 1991, 1 and 9.

<sup>633</sup> (1) Ronaldo Boy, for example, lost his grandmother in Barangay Nalunopan right before his eyes. He remarks, when asked if he went to see a psychologist or a doctor to process his experiences: "I was okay. But it took a long while, over several months when I would just be stricken dumb when the water would rise." Ronaldo Boy, interview with author, 21 April 2013, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. (2) Merlita, who saw her seven-year old son being carried away by the floodwaters, says, "I almost went crazy just thinking about it." Merlita, interview with author, 5 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino.

<sup>634</sup> P. Alix, "Prolonged psychosocial effects of the Ormoc Disaster, The role of personal variables, stressor characteristics, and coping responses," 92-131.

financial, emotional, spiritual and physical aspects of life, and the presence and intensity of psychiatric symptoms related to PTSD.<sup>635</sup>

Yet twenty-two years after the 1991 tragedy, Ormoc City has moved on. There are few reminders around the city of that tragedy except for the ubiquitous slit dams in Barangays Anilao, Biliboy and Malbasag, and flood control structures provided by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) through a 92.7 million-peso grant completed in 2001. For survivors, while most admitted to still feeling *sakit sa dughan*<sup>636</sup> when thinking about that day, many had re-married, had other children, pursued livelihoods, and had generally moved on with normalized lives. Of course, some may claim they will never forget that November, but some others insist it was a bitter day that should better be left in the past and forgotten. What was truly remarkable, however, was the strong sense of acceptance among them after twenty-two years, especially from the most economically marginalized, of a God who had permitted the tragedy, but no sense of anger, however feeble, against this unfathomable God.<sup>637</sup> One survivor succinctly notes that,

...It was only a test from God...The only thing I asked of Him was to be light-hearted. That was what I learned...Because though you were close to God, you were still tested.<sup>638</sup>

Did the survivors generally perceive themselves to be more religious after the tragedy? Not necessarily, as those who had been religious before the flood remained so, while those who were not did not also fundamentally change. Religiosity was not a long-term consequence of the disaster. It was

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<sup>635</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>636</sup> Bisaya, lit. pain in the heart. See Merlita, interview with author, 5 April 2013, in Ormoc City, and Elizabeth, interview with author, 6 April 2013, in Ormoc City.

<sup>637</sup> This conclusion obviously takes into consideration the time element explicit in the processing of the disaster experience by survivors. Alix, for instance, noted that 47 per cent of her respondents (total of 353) studied across three time periods (immediately after the Ormoc disaster, two months after, and two years after) attributed the disaster to supernatural causes. This included perceptions of either God or the devil as causing the destruction. P. Alix, "Ormoc revisited: Initial and long-term reactions and coping responses of disaster victims," *Aghamtao* Vol. 8 (Anthropological Association of the Philippines, 1996), 29.

<sup>638</sup> (1) Amparo, interview with author, 26 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino. Also, (2) Laura, interview with author, 7 June 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino, on the question of whether she had ever blamed God: "During the flood I did not blame Him [Author: Why? Why not?] not once. Because it's His way, if it is your time then that's it. I did not blame Him. No."



socio-economic and physical factors that determined regular attendance at mass, such as the availability of fare money or if their health permitted, and not the fear of another tragedy of this magnitude.<sup>639</sup>

The urban poor communities in Ormoc, indeed the most vulnerable, were far from silent observers of society. As relief workers and local government officials would later experience, they were “hard headed”<sup>640</sup> and, more importantly, only followed rules when they were convinced of the benefit to their lives. One relief officer notes, for example, of one Muslim survivor from Don Felipe being relocated to Tambulilid,

...[T]here’s somebody who’s running amok already you know the Muslim because they don’t want to be there...you know I have to grid it [referring to Tambulilid] because they have to have a road network inside, that’s what I said it has to be block by block and how many houses each block? I think around fifty. Block A, Block B, Block C...it was very organized...And the Muslim doesn’t want to occupy it, that space where I put them there...They started building up their houses in the road, in the road! And he was already bringing a *bolo*!<sup>641</sup> My people were already running away!”<sup>642</sup>

### Disaster and the loss of self

In the beautifully and sensitively rendered book *Everything in its Path* by Kai Erikson, he referred to the loss of the ‘furniture of self’—‘goods [that were] more than a form of decoration or a cushion against want; they [were] a measure of one’s substance as a person and as a provider’<sup>643</sup>—as death,

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<sup>639</sup> See, for example, (1) Apining, interview with author, 6 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino, on being asked if she still went to mass once a week as she had done prior to the flood (transcribed and translated by author): “Still once and if there is money, on Friday, like that. Then on holiday.” (2) Amadeo, interview with author, 6 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, when asked the same question, transcribed and translated by author: “Now no more...[Author: Why?] No more because I am sick. It’s abuse of the body. I won’t get to the finishing line anymore” [smiles]. Amadeo was incapacitated at home with painful gout.

<sup>640</sup> Cited from Dr. Gregorio Yrastorza, Jr. in Severino, “Ormoc revisited,” Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Filipino, lit. a large cutting tool often identified as a Muslim implement similar to the machete.

<sup>642</sup> D. Chua, interview with author, Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> K. Erikson, *Everything in its Path, Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1976), 174-177.

akin to the “loss of flesh.”<sup>644</sup> Its loss also meant the dispossession of the “evidence as to who one is and where one belongs in the world.”<sup>645</sup> In Ormoc in 1991, the most vulnerable families who had been interviewed in this research had very few if any material possessions prior to the flood. Unlike the Appalachia families of Buffalo Creek in Erikson’s book, the poorest and most vulnerable families in Ormoc in 1991 did not exhibit the same level of distress on the loss of the ‘furniture of self’ and even the complete destruction of their houses. Urban poor dwellers, for example, resided in shanties made from scraps of wood, tarpaulin, corrugated iron sheets, and cardboards that were not permanent structures for families to beautify or strengthen when money to do so was available. The houses, too, of sugarcane workers in the upland barangays of Ormoc were similarly constructed, this time with palm roofing and wooden or bamboo planks. While the urban poor houses contained more appliances and furniture typically considered as essential by city dwellers—such as television set, radio, table, chairs, and cabinet—sugarcane worker families had no such possessions. Among Ormoc survivors, the extent of the deep trauma brought by the loss of everything that had signified their lives so far was encapsulated in the simple statement that they had lost even their *kaldero* (rice pot) so that they could not cook rice, which was an integral part of any Filipino family meal.<sup>646</sup> The loss of the family’s *kaldero* meant hunger, a grim possibility for families who knew well how it was to be hungry. Sugarcane worker families, who often owned only one pot in the house and whose loss would have certainly been more devastating, felt the loss of the rice pot more acutely.

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> For example, Perlita, interview with author, 2 April 2013, in Purok II-B, , Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: “I arrived to see them without anything to eat. We also didn’t have our *kaldero* (pot), all our things were lost, which made me cry. It was good I had money, but though I had money there was nothing to buy. I said we will go somewhere the flood did not go. We will buy a *kaldero* there and *banig* (palm mat for sleeping).” Elizabeth, interview with author, Ibid., original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: “After that tragedy I don’t know what happened to us, I said where are we going when we didn’t even have clothes. We didn’t have food. We didn’t have a *kaldero*. No rice.”

If self-identity is closely defined by material possessions, especially inside the family home, the loss of these things that had been hard earned over many years truly signifies a loss of self. Among the poorest and most vulnerable families in Ormoc, however, material possessions are rare because any money that a family acquires automatically goes to the satisfaction of basic needs and there is no surplus for the purchase of household things that are primarily perceived as luxuries anyway. Most of the survivor families in Barangay Tambulilid who own a television set, radio, refrigerator, etc., also have to worry about security to ensure that no one steals anything from their houses at night or when no one is at home. For many families, the lack of possessions had a positive unintended effect because they were less likely to be targeted by petty thieving. In addition, these families were subjected to less gossip by neighbors, a phenomenon unique to crowded urban poor areas where gossip-mongering was a common pastime. Among sugarcane worker families, material possessions are even scarcer. As such, attachment to these things was not fully developed and expressed. Self-identity, however, was defined by relationships rather than possessions. One was always described as the parent, child, sibling, aunt, uncle, or cousin of person A or B, especially when being described to someone else. More interestingly, the ability to eat three times a day and send children to school despite poverty also strongly determined self-identity and self-worth. For these families therefore, the loss of self in disaster aftermath was intimately linked to the destruction of relationships, such as in the death of family members, with some still missing at present. Several of those who had been interviewed in this research note that they came close to losing their mind after the flood of November 1991 when they fully began to realize that a spouse, or a child, mother, father, grandparents, or siblings had been killed, and they had survived, a process that typically occurred a few days and weeks after 5 November 1991. The lack of a title to the house where survivor families had relocated was also strongly perceived by survivors as a continuing loss of self-identity, which deepened the feelings of insecurity brought about by the effects of the flood.

Yet, while survivors did experience individual and collective trauma after the massive death and destruction of the Ormoc 1991 flood, there were no documented cases of suicides in its aftermath. Cases of post-traumatic stress syndrome, however, were numerous, but for many survivors, formal therapy and counselling had not been institutionalized as part of coping programs provided by the local and national governments or even of non-government aid organizations at that time. It bears noting that mental health in the Philippines remains, until now, a taboo issue. As such, aside from a National Mental Health Policy (Administrative Order No. 8 s. 2001) signed by then Secretary of Health Manuel M. Dayrit, there are no laws that advocate for mental health care in the Philippines.<sup>647</sup> In addition, Filipino society in general does not consider mental health as a primary concern, reflected in the lack of legislative and financial support for people with mental illnesses. This was not any different in 1991, when relief and rehabilitation efforts did not automatically provide counselling to all those who had survived. Anecdotal testimonies by survivors point to the existence of individuals and families who had suffered from undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorders after the flash flood and eventually died of other health complications. For many survivors, personal trauma was a solitary experience of grief and loss that could not be shared even with family members, whose main goal was to keep the household focused on moving forward and surviving. Thus, a common observation shared by these survivors was that, looking back, they could only wonder how they survived when it was easier to give in to the despair. As such, for many there was no deep and introspective processing of grief that would have helped an individual come to terms with death and life, loss and coping, and ultimately finding meaning in the tragedy. Only one survivor, a library assistant, had noted that she had personally provided one-person act soliloquys for several years in the immediate aftermath in several school-based and community-based programs to commemorate the Ormoc 1991 tragedy. Her declamation piece, which she had written and acted in herself, depicted her personal experiences during that fateful day. For many, the default coping strategy had been to relegate the painful and dark memory

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<sup>647</sup> See WHO and the Department of Health, "WHO-AIMS Report on Mental Health System in the Philippines" (Manila, Philippines, 2007).

of the Ormoc flood to the past and instead focus on surviving the present. A common sentiment was that, though the memory will forever be part of a person's memory patterns, the constant reminiscing of the tragedy was anathema to forging a successful future; to move on therefore was divine. Ormoc must move on, if it wants to survive. The main lesson of that tragedy for many survivors is that disasters made them stronger. The reason why the few of them did not perish that day when so many in their families and communities had died was no longer important. What was important was to keep on surviving, because that November 1991 tragedy was not the last tragedy in one's life.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES: DISPLACEMENT AND THE LAND PROBLEM

In the aftermath of the 1991 disaster in Ormoc, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-Region VIII recommended the reforestation of “a 50 meter strip along the banks of all live rivers within the watershed,” the conversion of “all areas upstream with elevation of 400 meter sea level” into tree plantations “following all contour lines of 400 meters as boundary,” and “expansion of the remaining forest of the watershed] area by reforestation to cover at least 40% on the upper portion of the watershed.”<sup>648</sup> The Department of Agriculture (DA) went further by suggesting the total reforestation of Ormoc’s 4,500-hectare watershed.<sup>649</sup> The problem was that there was a lack of political interest in reforestation. “Convincing the landowners is a problem,” said Dr. Gregorio Yrastorza Jr., Ormoc councillor and chair of the City Disaster Coordinating Council (CDCC), “What we’re trying to come up with is a solution that they will be happy with, realizing that it is good for the majority.”<sup>650</sup> The national government in turn admitted its inability to enforce reforestation, with Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Fulgencio Factoran noting that the only viable approach is to

put pressure on them. And how do you put pressure on the rich? By getting the poor who are plenty to demonstrate. If there is another flood, the poor will be the first to die. This is the agrarian redux. You see it again and again and again.<sup>651</sup>

The year 1991 for Ormoc closed with the horrific images of mass death and destruction. The following year, 1992, was symbolic and transitional because relief and rehabilitation programs were slowly creating various new landscapes: NGOs and other relief organizations were overseeing the establishment of new communities in the wake of the relocation process; streets, bridges and other damaged and destroyed

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<sup>648</sup> DENR-Region VIII (1991), “Investigation report of the Ormoc City disaster,” 18.

<sup>649</sup> Cited in H. Severino, “Ormoc tragedy: Gov’t hands tied on reforestation,” 1& 12.

<sup>650</sup> Severino, “Ormoc revisited,” Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Severino, “Ormoc tragedy: Gov’t hands tied on reforestation,” Ibid.

infrastructure were being cleared up; and, there was a sense of purpose of rebuilding broken lives. On 1 July 1992, Dodong Codilla assumed local power, signalling the end to an era of landowner political leadership and ushering in renewed hope for a new brand of governance, one headed by a man who had himself emerged triumphant from poverty. Rehabilitation would actually further deepen during this new administration, and how the lives of the most vulnerable communities in Ormoc would be transformed can only be understood within this framework of political change in 1992. Many believed that the flood spelled the end of the Larrazabal-Locsin's political careers and the rise of the Codilla political clan as a viable alternative to feudal leadership.

### **Displacement and Relocation**

From the early to mid-1990s, collaboration between the government and non-government organizations (NGOs) and church groups undertaking housing projects in Ormoc continued, with the latter given much leeway in their operations. Seven housing projects contributed to a 'mild construction boom' in 1992, establishing new villages for flood survivors.<sup>652</sup> These villages were the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI) with 701 beneficiaries, 280 in the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Core Shelter, 190 in PhilRads, and 108 in Holy Wings, all in Barangay Tambulilid; 171 in Barangay Alta Vista; 25 in Su-ong in Barangay Curva, and 236 in Barangay Bagong Buhay.<sup>653</sup> The housing projects did not include those that had been funded by NGOs on their own, such as the resettlement villages of World Vision in barangays Linao and Ipil, the Benedictine Village project of the Benedictine sisters also in Ipil, the Red Cross Village in Bliss, Barangay Bagong Buhay, and the San Lorenzo Village comprised of 100 families<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> "Mild housing boom noted in Ormoc," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 November 1992, 7.

<sup>653</sup> Ormoc City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWD), "Master list of resettlement areas," Urban Poor Affairs Office, as of 2013. This official tally, however, differs from that found in the logbook at the Urban Poor Planning and Development Office of the Ormoc City Government, which states: PhilRads-119 flash flood victim-beneficiaries; Holy Wings-108; Alta Vista-171; Su-ong-25; and, Bagong Buhay-258. While it was clear in the Urban Poor logbook that the list referred only to flash flood victim-beneficiaries, the "Master list of resettlement areas" did not specify the beneficiaries as flash flood victims.

<sup>654</sup> E. Benedicto, "Ormoc after 3 years: 'No other way to go but up,'" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 6 November 1994, 1&7.

resettled in Barangay San Pablo and subsidized by the Archdiocese of Palo. The variety of housing projects headed by these organizations created opportunities for survivors to ‘window-shop’ for relocation sites and choose where to live, as recounted by a survivor,

When I looked at all the offers I chose Tambulilid actually because I considered all the proposed areas. When I was still connected with the Benedictine sisters as a member of faculty I thought that maybe I won’t want to stay long here, that I won’t want to be a teacher anymore so we decided, my wife, that we will go where it wasn’t connected with an employer, like that. True enough, I resigned after eight years.<sup>655</sup>

These houses cost from 5,300 pesos per unit for houses put up by the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI), to the 25,000 pesos per unit by the Archdiocese of Palo.<sup>656</sup> The projects were projected in 1992 to accommodate only 2,658 families, “less than half of those rendered homeless by the flood.”<sup>657</sup> The actual number of beneficiaries, however, based on the master list of the DSWD, was much lower at 1,801.<sup>658</sup>

Resettlement was offered primarily to evacuees residing at Tent City, who had once been informal settlers along the Anilao and Malbasag riverbanks. Radio announcements around Leyte province had been regularly broadcast for up to a year to inform survivors who had left Ormoc to go back and be listed for resettlement housing. The DSWD and various NGOs obviously defined the most vulnerable communities as those who had earlier resided along the two rivers, whose houses in the flood aftermath had been *hurót tanan*.<sup>659</sup> These were the families who were given much media attention, and as such received the bulk of humanitarian aid. However, much

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<sup>655</sup> Buboy, interview with author, 11 March 2013, in Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English, on the question if one could choose where to relocate, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid. However, RAFI, says Chief Operating Officer Dominica Chua, had already exited Ormoc in February 1992, and that the houses RAFI had financed could not be compared to low cost housing projects such as that funded by the Archdiocese of Palo.

<sup>657</sup> E. Benedicto, “Ormoc after 3 years: ‘No other way to go but up,’” Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ormoc City Social Development and Welfare Office (CSWD), “Master list of resettlement areas,” Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> Bisaya, lit. washed away completely.



less was reported about the proliferation of the ‘wise-out’ versus ‘washed-out’ families who saw in the disaster aftermath an opportunity to own homelots. Physical scars from the disaster became valuable social markers to signify who were genuine survivors from those who were not, and, by right, beneficiaries of all relief and rehabilitation programs, as one survivor noted:

It’s because you know every day it was increasing. You know people even though they weren’t washed out, [they were] wise out. [**Kevin Caballero**, a GK representative present during the interview: It’s because there were already benefits] In the beginning, it was do you have an *uwat*? What is your *uwat*? [**Caballero**: A mark]. Do you have a mark? [**Caballero**: Scar] Because that was what we knew if you were a survivor, that was it really. It was good that mine was on my foot, just my foot. That was it because in the beginning [there was] no house if you weren’t a survivor.<sup>660</sup>

As some cases in the following three chapters will show, cunning and savvy individuals, who should not have been recipients of aid, were still able to procure homelots through the use of personal networks and fraud:

Sometimes if you are just prudent and...you are really aggressive, you will really have a house. But if you just wait around, nothing [will happen] though there were free [housing]...even there, that was our situation [people wanting to be] first and who you know, it was like that. And even then there were lots who came in who were...yes really wise out, everyone, even implementers. I’m not talking in the RAFI but maybe some other co-implementers. Those that were free, you just have to pay for so you could get materials out [for housing].<sup>661</sup>

For many poor families, regardless of whether they were direct victims or not, the post-disaster situation was obviously an opportunity that could not be missed, especially in the procurement of a limited number of homelots.

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<sup>660</sup> Roberto ‘Buboy’ Igot and Kevin Caballero, simultaneous interviews with author, 11 March 2013, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>661</sup> Roberto ‘Buboy’ Igot, GK representative and himself a survivor, interview with author, 4 May 2013, at the Gawad Kalinga Provincial Office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author.

Yet, it cannot be overemphasized that groups of survivors did fall through the cracks during the relief and rehabilitation stage and were not able to take advantage of the offered benefits for many reasons. For families whose houses were only partially damaged, though they had also lived in precarious locations along the two rivers, evacuation to the public schools in the short term and resettlement in the long term were not high priorities compared with those whose houses were totally washed away. Renters and boarders were also left out, as were single- and female-headed households without extensive social networks, as were the case of recent migrant families. Worker families in *haciendas*, by virtue of being tied to their landlords who were assumed to take care of their needs as had been the case historically, were often also sidelined in government relief and rehabilitation programs. It was only through the initiative of church and non-government organizations that the plight of these marginalized groups were recognized and addressed. The relief situations of more remote communities that had also been badly affected were worse, as a selective media did not provide adequate exposure to their disaster experiences and needs, thus affecting the immediacy and potency of external assistance.

Another dimension of disaster aftermath often not given attention is that survivors may be put through a bizarre cycle of victimization by well-meaning individuals and groups who, in the process of asking them to recount disaster stories, actually pander to a public fascinated by 'disaster porn.' In Ormoc after the 1991 flood event, while this had not yet been fully developed by media compared with such disasters as the 2013 typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) storm surge in Tacloban City, an indication could already be glimpsed, as one survivor mused:<sup>662</sup>

...It was good that I had an outlet, the community at that time [referring to a Catholic lay organization he was part of], even though I thought that...it was like I was being taken advantaged of because

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<sup>662</sup> Disaster porn or disaster pornography, often associated with the media in disaster aftermath, is the re-framing of a "public issue" as merely a "private trouble," using the language of sociologist C. Wright Mills. Yet, for all the flaws of disaster porn, Recuber argues that it is still a critical political terrain where "publics are at least implicitly asked to struggle with the social significance of the suffering of others." T. Recuber, "Disaster porn!" Contexts 2013, *SAGE Journals* (11 May 2013) (Online).

every time there was a gathering it was like my sharing was to add spice because the speaker [for an event] would not be very good...So it was like I even felt sometimes that I was being abused...my wife said I shouldn't share [my stories] anymore.<sup>663</sup>

In many cases, such a disaster opens space and opportunity for a government to enforce pre-existing land use laws and, particularly in the case of urban areas, slum clearance policies that had not been previously enforced.<sup>664</sup> One of the most immediate consequences of rehabilitation and reconstruction that has received widespread interest among scholars and practitioners is the issue of resettlement, in particular involuntary resettlement.<sup>665</sup> The World Bank defines involuntary resettlement as both “displacement triggered by environmental degradation, disasters, conflicts or development projects that cause people to lose land or other assets, as well as lose access to resources, and the process of assistance for these people to improve, or at the least restore, lost incomes and living standards.”<sup>666</sup>

In Ormoc after November 1991, the flash flood provided the local government with a firmer resolve in imposing the legal easement provision that prohibited the building of any structure within three meters from the bank of any river in urban areas. It wasn't easy, as original settlers along the

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<sup>663</sup> Buboy, interview with author, original in Filipino and English, when asked whether he experienced symptoms of depression and how long it took him to come to terms with his experience.

<sup>664</sup> See also for cases in Sri Lanka and India, J. Shaw and I. Ahmed, *Design and Delivery of Post-Disaster Housing Resettlement Programs, Case Studies from Sri Lanka and India*, Report 6. (Monash University and RMIT University (Undated) (Online).

<sup>665</sup> See, for example A. Jha with J. Barenstein, P. Phelps, D. Pittet and S. Sena, “To relocate or not to relocate,” *Safer Homes, Stronger Communities, A Handbook for Reconstructing after Natural Disasters* (World Bank, 2010), Chapter 5; J. Shaw and I. Ahmed, *Design and Delivery of Post-Disaster Housing Resettlement Programs, Case Studies from Sri Lanka and India*; A. Oliver-Smith, “Successes and failures in post-disaster resettlement,” in *Disasters, The Journal of Disaster Studies and Management* Vol. 15 No. 1 (March 1991), 12-13; B.J. Batra and S. Chaudhry, *International Human Rights Standards on Post-disaster Resettlement and Rehabilitation*, Working document (Habitat International Coalition-Housing and Land Rights Network and People's Movement for Human Rights Learning in collaboration with the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, August 2005); E. Correa with F. Ramirez and H. Sanahuja, *Populations at Risk of Disaster, A Resettlement Guide* (World Bank and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2011); and, M. Cernea (ed), *The Economics of Involuntary Resettlement, Questions and Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1999).

<sup>666</sup> World Bank, “Social Development, Involuntary resettlement.” Last updated 28 May 2010 (Online).

riverbanks did not always want to be resettled elsewhere.<sup>667</sup> Some families indeed went back to their original areas of residence in the aftermath of the disaster. But for those who agreed to be resettled, they had to satisfy the criteria identified by the DSWD and NGOs and recommended by barangay officials.<sup>668</sup> The NGOs then, in an effort to discourage dole out, organized food-and-house-for-work programs that required beneficiary families to take an active involvement in the construction of their own houses, as one recipient in a World Vision village explained:

Here, we were screened ma'am...as beneficiary that time when we arrived here we worked and were paid in noodles and rice. That was during the flood. We were beneficiaries from the flood who came from Malbasag as almost everyone who came here came from Malbasag because of World Vision so we came here to work on our houses which according to Ma'am Vivian [referring to Vivian Valdesanzo, the project director of World Vision in Ormoc] for every one house there should be two workers so the payment was three kilos of rice and five dried fishes and two [packs of] noodles, but we who had worked, we owned the house, this house, that was our recompense.<sup>669</sup>

The Ormoc City government pursued a second involuntary resettlement program when the Japanese government, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), provided a grants-in-aid project amounting to 1.2 billion pesos for flood control. The Philippine government raised in turn nearly 300 million pesos as counterpart funding. The resulting resettlement program entailed the identification of 4,701 dwelling units, mostly along the banks of the Anilao and Malbasag Rivers that were identified as damageable assets in 1994 and the estimation of a total compensation cost of 443.4 million pesos, divided into land acquisition and

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<sup>667</sup> See E. Benedicto, "Ormoc City revisited: Memories of killer flood start to fade," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 5 November 1995, 19.

<sup>668</sup> Beneficiary selection for resettlement in Sri Lanka after the 2001 tsunami was also a process highly prone to politics, as the eligibility criteria were very broad and open to discretion from local officials. J. Shaw and I. Ahmed, *Design and Delivery of Post-Disaster Housing Resettlement Programs, Case Studies from Sri Lanka and India*, 18-19.

<sup>669</sup> Mila, interview with author, 23 June 2013, in World Vision Village in Barangay Ipil, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

house evacuation for those who were affected by the project.<sup>670</sup> The city government also appropriated five million pesos in the 1997 annual budget for land development and 2.027 million pesos for water development in the resettlement area of Barangay JICA-Lao.<sup>671</sup> Only 526 families were finally listed as beneficiaries resettled in JICA-Lao, mostly affected by the flood control project, but some of whom had also been identified as flood victims as well.<sup>672</sup> According to the project supervisor, Shuji Kaku of CTI Engineering International, the consultant for the JICA grant,

Land had to be reclaimed in order to widen the rivers, so we had to ask the people living there to move elsewhere. The residents were told to move elsewhere. The residents were told that the project would make life safer for them, but they couldn't understand why they had to leave the place they called home.<sup>673</sup>

From 1997 to 2001, four new bridges and three slit dams were constructed in Ormoc City to confine the flood discharge of a 50-year return period flood.<sup>674</sup> In addition, JICA also widened and re-channelled the rivers, constructed an impressive dike system, and finished the project on schedule, a fact that always brought amazement, as one government personnel noted,

You can see that the infrastructure now was really done very well. Because there was a rumor, it was only a rumor that there were still Japanese gold still hidden there [along the riverbanks]. That's why some people would say that's why the Japanese came to Ormoc to build it [referring to the flood control project]. Because Ormoc was one of the sites of the fiercest battle of World War II, and it was the last stand of the Japanese here in Ormoc. So they say there were lots of

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<sup>670</sup> JICA and Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) of the Republic of the Philippines, "Study on the flood control for rivers in the selected urban centers," Final Report Vol 3 Supporting Report. (CTI Engineering Co., Ltd. February 1995), 4-17.

<sup>671</sup> Letter of city mayor Eufrocino Codilla, Sr. addressed to Hiroshi Goto, JICA resident representative dated 11 March 1997, in JICA and DPWH, "Basic design study report on flood mitigation project in Ormoc City," Ibid., Annex III.

<sup>672</sup> Office of the City Mayor, "Logbook of the Urban Poor Planning and Development." Ormoc City, accessed 22 March 2013.

<sup>673</sup> Cited in Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), "Support for typhoon-stricken Leyte island," *JICA's World* Vol. 5 No. 5. (Tokyo, Japan April 2014), 4-5 (Online).

<sup>674</sup> S. Jose Vanzi, "P676-M anti-flood projects finished in Ormoc," *Newsflash, Philippine Headline News Online*, 23 April 1999 (Online).

Yamashita treasure here...In fact the Japanese even during the night they continued to do the work so people would say, so that the Filipinos would not see that [they were looking for the treasure] [laughs].<sup>675</sup>

The effectiveness of the flood control project was touted widely after the minimal damage sustained by the city despite the onslaught of severe tropical storm Koni (Gilas) on 15 to 23 July 2003 with maximum winds of 110 kilometers per hour (kph).<sup>676</sup>

The impact of the great flood disaster on the Ormoc population was undeniably uneven. Some groups were worse off after the flood than others, a measure of how past circumstances had contributed to people's present and future abilities to cope with such an unnatural and destructive hazard. Theoretically, while the rescue and relief stages in the immediate disaster aftermath provided assistance to a wider affected public, the recovery and rehabilitation stage was streamlined to help more vulnerable communities and groups get back on their feet. Resettlement, as a popular program often adopted in disaster rehabilitation, assumes that it is the best option in providing new lives and reducing future risks.<sup>677</sup> Yet, as other cases around the world have shown, resettlement often pursued as an imposed program in disaster aftermath, comes with a variety of social and economic costs. Cernea succinctly captures the dilemma,

Forced displacement epitomizes social exclusion of certain groups of people. It cumulates physical exclusion from a geographic territory with economic and social exclusion out of a set of functioning social networks. The concept of exclusion...adds to the understanding of impoverishment.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> Coloy, government personnel, interview with author, 19 March 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>676</sup> See I. Antonio, "Community commitment for sustained efficiency of infrastructures: Ormoc City, Philippines."

<sup>677</sup> See A. Jha with J. Barenstein, P. Phelps, D. Pittet and S. Sena, *Safer Homes, Stronger Communities, A Handbook for Reconstructing after Natural Disasters*.

<sup>678</sup> M. Cernea, "Impoverishment risks, risk management, and reconstruction: A model of population displacement and resettlement," Paper presented at the *UN Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development*, Beijing, China, 27-29 October 2004.

Involuntary resettlement programs have been widely documented as threatening individual and community identity and wellbeing, and as such have fomented various forms of resistance among affected populations.<sup>679</sup> However, in many ways, resettlement in disaster aftermath cannot automatically be defined as involuntary. A major disaster can influence affected populations, especially the most vulnerable groups, to look at relocation as a more viable option to staying so that resistance to such a policy can dwindle. In Ormoc, relocation initiatives due to the utter scale of destruction of houses and communities because of the flood and the subsequent flood control project were generally perceived positively. The military was indeed deployed to high-risk areas to prevent stragglers from rebuilding on their old lots, but in general, survivors were keen to move. In fact, only six people expressed opposition to relocation, which city mayor Eufrocino Codilla, Sr. dismissed to JICA as,

purely an expression of sentiments and the lack of knowledge and information of the resettlement program and development of the City Government counterpart...[and] that the objection is the only one of its kind and is not supported nor initiated by NGOs or any people's power showing opposition and unwillingness to abide and agree to the resettlement plan of the city. Hence, we earnestly request your office that the opposition letter be disregarded and not be given importance because the complaint does not speak for the majority of the affected families but purely a product of personal emotions.<sup>680</sup>

Of course the situation would change as years passed, as recipients sold off their residential rights for tidy sums. Home lots in Barangay JICA-Lao, for instance, were sold for as low as 25,000 pesos to as high as 500,000 pesos between the years 1999 to 2000, while rent for lots in the same barangay was commonly a low of 1,000 to 2,000 pesos a month.<sup>681</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> A. Oliver-Smith, "Involuntary resettlement, resistance and political empowerment," *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol 4 No 2 (Oxford University Press, 1991), 132-149.

<sup>680</sup> Letter of city mayor Eufrocino Codilla, Sr. addressed to Hiroshi Goto.

<sup>681</sup> Office of the City Mayor, "Logbook of the Urban Poor Planning and Development." Ormoc City, 22 March 2013. When asked where these survivor families went after selling their rights

What then were the long-term effects of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy on people's lives, especially those deemed to be the most vulnerable? Twenty-two years after, were those who had been identified as the most vulnerable groups and communities and subsequently resettled in new communities able to become more resilient and far less vulnerable? How did other vulnerable communities, such as those residing and working in *haciendas* that had also experienced devastation and had fewer entitlements, fare in the intervening years? How exactly did the disaster change the lives of these various families and communities? These questions form the overarching theme in this quest to understand the nature of social transformation in disaster aftermath. Vulnerability has been argued to be a "dynamic, evolutionary and accretive process," "a more accurate concept than poverty in understanding the processes and impacts of 'underdevelopment'."<sup>682</sup> The causal link between disaster vulnerability and social transformation is argued here to be mediated in large measure by resettlement because house and land should provide families and communities with the means to move out of vulnerability, that "internal risk factor of the subject or system that is exposed to a hazard or damage."<sup>683</sup> The distribution of homelots to previously unlanded families, who had in the past risked residing in environmentally unsafe areas, should in theory have allowed them to improve their socio-economic positions. In Ormoc where the persistent and underlying source of vulnerability has been the lack of land tenure, the distribution of land and housing should have manifestly reduced vulnerability and poverty, however incremental. Much has been written about the argument that "poverty is not synonymous with vulnerability," whereby the former primarily implies a relationship with society while the latter is a product of a two-sided relationship with society and the physical environment.<sup>684</sup> However, in the reconstruction and rehabilitation period, and in the decades following a major

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at JICA-Lao and whether they went back to being informal settlers, the officers at the Urban Poor Planning and Development Office could only say they don't know.

<sup>682</sup> G. Bankoff and D. Hilhorst, "Introduction: Mapping vulnerability," 2-3.

<sup>683</sup> The definition of vulnerability is taken from O. Cardona, "The need for rethinking the concepts of vulnerability and risk from a holistic perspective: A necessary review and criticism for effective risk management," in *Mapping Vulnerability, Disasters, Development and People*, edited by Bankoff, Frerks and Hilhorst, 37.

<sup>684</sup> B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon and I. Davis (eds), *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Natural Disasters* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 32.



disaster like the flood of 1991, the two appear very much linked. As such, resettlement, as primarily a solution to vulnerability, cannot resolve the problem of social inequality and deprivation due to inadequate family income, lack of social security nets, and the persistent lack of land tenure notwithstanding the resettlement program. It is not surprising, therefore, that the poorest individuals in society continue to be the most vulnerable despite the resettlement process. Nonetheless, those who were not resettled elsewhere but continued to reside in the same areas that had been devastated in 1991 had more difficulty coping and rebuilding their lives, and did in effect experience continuing vulnerability and poverty.

### **The case studies**

The following three chapters deal with three different case studies of communities in Ormoc that had experienced the devastating disaster in November 1991. These three cases were chosen to analyse, and compare and contrast cases of social transformation. In the context of disaster, social transformation has been understood as “large-scale demolition” and urban restructuring,<sup>685</sup> as figuratively causing the “rich to become poor and the poor to become rich,”<sup>686</sup> and, utilizing a gender approach, “the transformation of power relationships within the household by facilitating the economic and social empowerment of women.”<sup>687</sup> It has also been largely understood and framed in terms of resilience, although there is a different emphasis in terms of the depth and scale between the two concepts of resilience vis-à-vis social transformation. While resilience is found at the core of transformative societies in disaster aftermath, the relationship is best exemplified as “nested

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<sup>685</sup> C. Hein, “Resilient Tokyo, Disaster and transformation in the Japanese city,” in *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster*, ed. L. Vale and T. Campanella (Oxford University Press, 2005), 213.

<sup>686</sup> Ivarsson proposes an interesting argument in relation to the effects of the tsunami in Sri Lanka: “...the tsunami disaster not only destroyed and changed physical habitats and livelihoods, but it also interrupted local social, moral and cosmological ‘landscapes’ in ways that caused multiple moral crises.” C. Ivarsson, “The give and take of disaster aid, Social and moral transformation in the wake of the tsunami in Sri Lanka” (PhD diss. in Social Anthropology. Sweden, University of Gothenburg: School of Global Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2013), 6 (Online).

<sup>687</sup> P. Delaney and E. Shrader, “Gender and post-disaster reconstruction: The case of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras and Nicaragua,” decision review draft. Gender and Disaster Network, January 2000 (Online).

systems to be infected by or contain change.”<sup>688</sup> A frenzy of infrastructure work occurred in Ormoc in the second year after the 1991 flood, with the local government and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) rebuilding roads, bridges, river dikes and drainage.<sup>689</sup> At the most superficial level, the transformation of the cityscape was apparent for all to see four years after the disaster. There were at least twelve banks that regularly operated in Ormoc by 1995, while several shipping lines such as Aboitiz International, Socor Shipping Lines and GothongLunes’ MV Dona Lili also opened services. A huge sixty million-peso sports complex, named the Ormoc Superdome, was constructed in 1996.<sup>690</sup>

In the following case studies, social transformation is defined as the reduction and, ideally, the elimination of vulnerability, and in the process the elimination or, at the least, movement out of poverty. Wisner et al (2004) define vulnerability as

*...the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (an extreme event or process) (original emphasis).*<sup>691</sup>

Poverty and vulnerability in these three cases are explored together. In the Philippines, the lack of access to land is strongly correlated to poverty and social inequality.<sup>692</sup> The entangled issues that are explored in these cases deal with land tenure as a consequence of resettlement or its lack in the case of *hacienda* workers, as well as income, employment, sources of emergency funding in times of crises, social networks, social and economic mobility, education, and religious beliefs and practices, and the changes that did occur as a result of a life-changing event like the 1991 flash flood. This

<sup>688</sup> M. Pelling and D. Manuel-Navarete, “From resilience to transformation: The adaptive cycle in two Mexican urban centers,” *Ecology and Society* Vol. 16 No. 2. ISSN: 1708-3087 (The Resilience Alliance, 2011) (Online).

<sup>689</sup> E. Benedicto, “Ormoc after 3 years: ‘No other way to go but up,’” *Ibid.*

<sup>690</sup> E. Benedicto, “Ormoc disaster: A city rising from tragedy,” *Ibid.*

<sup>691</sup> Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon and Davis (eds), *At Risk*, 11.

<sup>692</sup> G. Llanto and M. Ballesteros, “Land issues in poverty reduction strategies and the development agenda: Philippines,” *Philippine Institute for Development Studies* discussion paper series no. 2003-03 (Makati City, Philippines: National Economic Development Agency (NEDA), March 2003) (Online).

approach recognizes the inherent links that tie poverty and vulnerability to one another as product and fate, and is based on the assumption that those who were deemed the most vulnerable were also those who continue to experience a basic lack of economic well-being, as well as those with the least access to resources. The three cases are similar in that all the respondents had experienced the devastating impacts of the 1991 flash flood. Through two communities in Barangay Tambulilid, the subject of **Chapter 6**, I explore change and transformation in disaster aftermath within the framework of Gawad Kalinga's community development model. This model did not originally target to assist the 1991 flood victims but the urban poor in general, as Gawad Kalinga had introduced a new and radical form of land tenure system called land occupancy rather than ownership.<sup>693</sup> Barangay Nalunopan, in **Chapter 7**, is an examination of disaster aftermath among survivors in one of the poorest communities in Ormoc, the *hacienda* workers. Finally, Purok Luna II-B in Barangay Luna was funded and continues to be managed by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ). This last case study, dealt with in **Chapter 8**, is a story of change and transformation for former Barangay Nalunopan *hacienda* workers who had survived the 1991 tragedy and actively chose to start new lives outside the *hacienda*.

The identification of these cases began with a list of those barangays that had been adversely affected in 1991. These included Barangays Alegria, Malbasag, District 26 (in particular Isla Verde), Biliboy, Don Felipe Larrazabal, Mabini, Ipil (especially along Panalian River), and Can-adieng, the seaside barangay of Punta, and within the city center Barangay Cogon and along the major streets of Bonifacio, Rizal and Real. Once the list of affected barangays and areas was compiled, a list of resettlement areas was also requested from the city Social Welfare and Development office. After consultations with local government and barangay officials, from whom permission was requested to conduct interviews, coordination with religious and grassroots non-government organizations (NGOs) resulted in the

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<sup>693</sup> Gawad Kalinga or GK prefers to call itself a social movement rather than an NGO. Roberto Igot, GK representative Ormoc City, Ibid.

identification of a pool of respondents who fit the criteria of having personally experienced the 1991 flash flood and who were amenable to being interviewed. It must be emphasized here that the assistance of these religious and non-government organizations and barangay officials was crucial, as they provided the basis for the researcher to undertake the study. Linkage with these grassroots organizations and individuals also provided venues for the prompt validation of findings, as well as for critical discussions through which research questions were clarified and re-focused.

Participant observation and interviews in three sites—Barangays Tambulilid, Nalunopan and Luna II-B—and undertaken from February to October 2013, in many ways, shaped the direction of the research. The decision, for instance, to focus on the poorest and most vulnerable communities and families was the result of a self-reflexive cycle of inquiry that followed every visit to each of the three sites. On the one hand, the rhetoric expressed by representatives of grassroots NGOs and groups emphasized the positive changes in the lives of these communities and families as a result of their intervention. But on the other hand was the reality of families and communities that remained desperately poor despite numerous intervention programs. How was this gap to be explained? This question increasingly became the central point of inquiry. As these three cases will show, there are varying degrees of grinding poverty and persistent vulnerability that two decades of city-wide rehabilitation and reconstruction have not been able to eliminate.

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## FROM URBAN SQUATTING TO URBAN SQUATTING

*In the resettlement site itself, where the 40-sq m houses are only a few feet apart, basic amenities of life are often absent. Clean water for drinking and cooking is a luxury. The site's only well yields brackish water, and residents are forced to buy potable water at Php 3 for a 4-liter gallon from mobile "water men." Lack of water also besets the five other resettlement sites in Tambulilid and nearby Linao.*

*Money is not supposed to be a problem. The city government's bank account includes P5.1 million, the balance of a Php12.8 million aid Malacañang gave to Ormoc for its water projects.*

- E. Benedicto, "Scars remain, trauma lingers," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 5 November 1994, 1& 13

*Land ownership remains a big question as the land title of the Tambulilid resettlement site is still in the name of the city government.*

- E. Justimbaste, "Ormoc does little to avert another potential disaster," *Manila Bulletin*, 14 November 1995, 46

Survivors of the 1991 disaster were first relocated, generally willingly, to the Tent City organized by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and after two years to permanent resettlement areas around Ormoc. The majority of those who went to Barangay Tambulilid, the resettlement site identified by the local government in the aftermath of the disaster, had to endure the economic and social costs associated with relocation. For most, it meant restricted access to the city where they had depended for their livelihoods. It also meant confronting the challenge of creating new communities out of *sagol-sagol*<sup>694</sup> families who were linked together only by their shared history as squatters and disaster survivors. How does resettlement affect and indeed transform such diverse families and communities? More importantly, what kinds of communities emerge in such disaster resettlement areas?

This chapter analyses the experience of families and communities in Barangay Tambulilid, where the majority of those who had been worst

<sup>694</sup> Bisaya, lit. assorted, diverse, of different classes, mixed. This term is often used to describe Tambulilid as a melting pot of all kinds of people.

affected in November 1991 were resettled, including former Isla Verde residents. Isla Verde had been the quintessence of a squatter community in Ormoc, occupying a sandbar in the mouth of the Anilao River so that when the flood came in November 1991, it was virtually wiped out. Flood survivors were initially given homelots during the rehabilitation phase, with the aim of transforming them into new self-reliant communities. However, as the case of Tambulilid will show—topographically one of the worst sites for relocation—the persistent problem of land tenure highlights the lack of sustainable programs for livelihood development, persistent unemployment and informal employment, and poor infrastructure that all contribute to the cyclical problem of vulnerability, social inequality and poverty. In fact, resettlement to Tambulilid had opened the door to a far more difficult dilemma that revolved around the trade-off between proximity to economic opportunities, security of tenure and provision of services vis-à-vis protection from extreme events and the goal of reducing costs to life and property due to disasters.<sup>695</sup> These are concerns that still hound those most at risk of disasters in Ormoc twenty-two years after the major flood.

### **A topographical risk**

Tambulilid is a contraction of the words “buli” or *buri* referring to the species of palm that proliferated in the area and “tambo” or reed, which had been equally abundant. It was formerly a *sitio*<sup>696</sup> of Barangay Linao before its inauguration as an independent barangay in 1977.<sup>697</sup> The Ablen family, generally recognized as having brought the Virgen de la Paz from Antipolo, Rizal, is considered as one of three founding families of the barangay.<sup>698</sup> The Virgen was subsequently adopted as patroness prior to the Japanese

<sup>695</sup> UN Habitat, “Addressing urban poverty, inequality, and vulnerability in a warming world,” *Asia Pacific Issue Brief Series on Urbanization and Climate Change No. 1* (Thailand: United Nations Development Program, Undated), 8 (Online).

<sup>696</sup> Filipino, lit. settlement forming part of a *barangay*, typically rural. *Sitios* are smaller than *puroks*, which are sub-barangays that are more urbanized.

<sup>697</sup> Its barangay captains were: Glicerio Codilla Albaño (1977-1993); Morino Castañeda (1993-1997); Crispulo Espina, Jr. (1997-2002); Maximo Jaballa, Jr. (2002-2007); Rodrigo Sasing (2007-2010); and, Ronaldo Roca (2010-2013). Barangay Tambulilid City Hall, *Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) Comprehensive Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (CMDP) 2012-2014*, assisted by *Liga ng mga Barangay* Ormoc City Chapter, in coordination with City Government of Ormoc, DILG and BIDANI, VSU, VISCA, Baybay City (Ormoc City, Undated), 2.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

occupation and is now venerated in a *fiesta* every twentieth of May. Geographically speaking, Tambulilid is marshy land prone to flooding. Situated between barangays Libertad in the north, Linao in the south, Punta in the east, and Naungan in the west, it is classified as a plain and a catch basin with an elevation range of 0 to 20 degrees. Categorized as a first class barangay, it occupies a total land area of 179 hectares and has a distance of 3.8 kilometers from the city proper.<sup>699</sup> In November 1991, as the deluge swept over the Anilao and Malbasag riverbanks, some parts of Tambulilid were also inundated from the creek that passed through it. Small agricultural and residential lands were devastated, upon which many poor families had relied for their living. Though Tambulilid was not officially listed among those sites identified by the city government as a disaster area, forty-six year old Divina, who had lived in the barangay for several years before 1991, identified her family as direct victims:

**Divina:** What I...thought about was how we were going to harvest our rice [voice wobbling]. Our rice will not ever dry.

**Author:** Where did you live?

**Divina:** Here, near the outside [of Tambulilid]. Then our house was flooded, but it was not swept away, just flooded. We had some animals. Our chickens died...I did not know our pig was in its pen...already swimming. Our things were floating but they did not scatter about because our house was shut though it was only a hut, we had secured the downstairs. There our things floated amidst our jars. I thought, gosh, maybe we will die. It is our time. I thought Lord it is up to you to kill me so long as my children are safe, that was my thought, but I never thought about food anymore. Our bananas that were with fruit, they were newly with fruit, gone. *Sakit kaayo dughan* (My heart is so painful).<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>699</sup> Department of Education (DepEd)-Region VIII, *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, Appendix 1, 176.

<sup>700</sup> Divina, interview with author, 5 April 2013, at GK provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, translated to Filipino by Victor Arcuiño during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by author.

Floods, however, were 'normal' in Tambulilid, as Barangay Captain Ronaldo Roca notes:

**Barangay Captain Roca:** It is really normal here during high tide, for example this month is high tide, there will really be water here.

**Author:** At what level is the usual flooding? How high is the water? To the waist?

**Roca:** To the knee. But when it is low tide it is low. When the high tide occurs with continuous rain, rain for two days, it will really...one hundred per cent flood here...It was sugarcane here before.<sup>701</sup>

It was still sparsely populated in 1991, utilized primarily for rice and sugar cultivation. According to another long-time resident:

**Marife:** [Tambulilid was]...still small, not like today there are so many houses. We were only about twenty houses here ma'am.

**Author:** Only twenty? What was Tambulilid, rice fields?

**Marife:** Rice and sugar. These were sugar fields nearby.<sup>702</sup>

However, the rapid urbanization of Tambulilid after 1991 is noteworthy as land use was eventually reclassified as residential and utilized about ninety hectares. Agricultural and industrial uses accounted for eighty hectares, while the remaining ten hectares were allocated for forest/reserve/watershed use.<sup>703</sup> As Ormoc increasingly urbanized, however, land allocated for agricultural and industrial as well as for other purposes continued to decrease, while land for residential uses correspondingly increased. Today, Tambulilid is accessible from the city proper by specially designated tricycles, which pass through Barangay Linao, but in 1991 it was virtually cut off from the city with no regular public transport system in place.

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<sup>701</sup> Barangay Captain Ronaldo Roca, interview with author, 28 May 2013, at GK Barangay Tambulilid, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>702</sup> Marife, interview with author, 5 April 2013, at GK provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, translated to Filipino by Victor Arcuiño during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by author.

<sup>703</sup> Barangay Tambulilid City Hall, *Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) Comprehensive Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (CMDP) 2012-2014*, 2.



However, though a small community in 1991, officials from the barangay still went around urging the rural folk to be prepared for typhoon Uring and to evacuate to someplace safe away from the creek on the morning of 5 November 1991, as one resident attests:

What was fortunate in the barangay they went around early in the morning to announce, first to be prepared, to evacuate to where it was far from the river, that was what they said. So we did, we were afraid of being swept away. My in-laws had fortified their house. But for us, we just left our house. We left it, and the pig that was already big enough to be useful, we dragged behind us.<sup>704</sup>

### **Squatting and the urban poor**

Into this generally small rice- and sugar-farming community, squatters from the Anilao and Malbasag areas were inserted in a process of forced urbanization as a consequence of the 1991 flood. In the Philippines, the terms ‘squatter’ and ‘urban poor’ are used interchangeably,<sup>705</sup> with both having negative connotations. It is notable for instance that the 1992 law on urban development and housing or Republic Act 7279, which provided the legal basis for the relocation of disaster survivors, views squatters as generally professionals who were,

...individuals or groups who occupy lands without the express consent of the landowner and who have *sufficient income* for legitimate housing. The term shall also apply to persons who have previously been awarded homelots or housing units by the Government but who sold, leased or transferred the same to settle illegally in the same place or in another urban area, and non-bona fide occupants and intruders of lands reserved for socialized housing. The term *shall not*

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<sup>704</sup> Divina, interview with author, 5 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> E. Berner, “Legalizing squatters, excluding the poorest: Urban land transfer programs in the Philippines,” Working paper no. 257 (University of Bielefeld, Faculty of Sociology, Sociology of Development Research Center, 1996), 1. Manaster defines a squatter as “persons who occupy, without consent, land owned by others, with the purpose of occupying such lands indefinitely for residential and occupational uses. K. Manaster, “The problem of urban squatters in developing countries: Peru,” Faculty publications 1-1-1968 (Santa Clara University School of Law, 1968), 23 (Online).

*apply to individuals or groups who simply rent land and housing from professional squatters or squatting syndicates* (emphasis added).<sup>706</sup>

The law, however, does not clarify what “sufficient income for legitimate housing” meant. Often regarded as “physically decrepit slums, lacking in basic amenities, chaotic and disorganized,”<sup>707</sup> squatter settlements were argued to be a consequence of “the unresponsiveness of housing supply” and more provocatively, the “possible unwillingness of the private sector to respond to the low end of the market.”<sup>708</sup> This situation has forced the poorest sectors of society to engage in the creation of informal housing, including squatting on both public and private lands. Those who were originally resettled in Tambulilid from the riverbanks of Anilao and Malbasag were the masses that had occupied the lowest rungs of society, where proximity to the city had been critical to their livelihoods and paid employment. Indeed, in 2011 Barangay Tambulilid was one of the biggest barangays in Ormoc, with a population totalling 9,136.<sup>709</sup> The majority of its residents belonged to the 25-59 age group (forty per cent), followed by the 6 to 12 (sixteen per cent), the 3 to 5 (seven per cent), and the 19 to 21-age range (six per cent).

Tambulilid’s total population in 2008 was recorded at 8,128, comprised of 1,484 households and further broken down into 3,838 males and 4,290 females.<sup>710</sup> Its residents were predominantly from lower-income families, with commonly declared professions as teachers, engineers, seamen, policemen, overseas contract workers, nurses, skilled artisans, drivers, welders, tailors, mechanics, carpenters, bus conductors, laborers, salespersons, maids, security guards, car washers, members of the Citizen

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<sup>706</sup> Republic Act No. 7279, “An act to provide for a comprehensive and continuing urban development and housing program, establish the mechanism for its implementation, and for other purposes,” Sec 3, Definition of terms (m).

<sup>707</sup> B.J.L. Berry, *The Human Consequences of Urbanization* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 83.

<sup>708</sup> J. Brueckner and H. Selod, “A theory of urban squatting and land-tenure formalization in developing countries,” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* Vol 1 No. 1, 29 (February 2009) (Online).

<sup>709</sup> *Liga ng mga Barangay*, “Table 1. Populasyon ng Barangay ayon sa Edad at Kasarian (Table 1. Population of the Barangay According to Age and Sex): Barangay Tambulilid as of 31 December 2011,” *Barangay Management Information System* (BMIS).

<sup>710</sup> Barangay Tambulilid City Hall, *Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) Comprehensive Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (CMDP) 2012-2014*, Ibid.

Armed Force Geographic Unit (CAFGU), barangay health workers, and fishpond caretakers.<sup>711</sup> Sixty-five per cent of the total population was classified as Roman Catholic, ten per cent as *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (INC), and twenty-five per cent as Protestants (five per cent each as Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and Church of the Latter Day Saints, and ten per cent as Church of Christ).<sup>712</sup> Men, who were often the breadwinners of their families, were commonly teachers, tricycle drivers operating on a *boundary* arrangement,<sup>713</sup> contractual government employees, market laborers, itinerant fruit vendors, masons, carpenters, meat or fish vendors, construction workers, welders, small-time entrepreneurs or retailers, tailors and scrap collectors. Some were *istambays*<sup>714</sup> or unemployed. Meanwhile, some women were typically sales clerks, fish or meat vendors or laundry women, but most were housewives left with the care of children and elderly, and often the management of *sari-sari*<sup>715</sup> stores that proliferated along every street corner.

The intricate relationships these people had cultivated with the city that not only tolerated them, but also demanded their services, contributed to the mushrooming of riverbank settlements. Ormoc by 1991 was completely mapped and titled. Indeed, there was no more land that was not yet owned by anyone, especially the leading families of Ormoc, so that only riverbanks provided precarious but viable spaces that a family could live on. Though the

<sup>711</sup> Ibid., 5. However, this list does not define these "skills" and as such have overlapping figures. The verbatim list is as follows: "Professionals – 23 teachers, 12 engineers, 7 seamen, 5 policemen, 4 OCWs [taken to refer to overseas contract workers], 15 nurse, 3 marine seaman, 1 skilled artisan – 33 drivers, 11 welder, 5 tailor, 2 mechanics, 16 carpenters and 3 conductor, 17 laborer – 35 sales persons, 18 maids, 16 security guards, 2 car washers, 1 CAFGU, 5 BHW [taken to refer to barangay health workers], 45 fishpond caretaker".

<sup>712</sup> Ibid., 2. There is no estimated population of Muslims in this list, although there is a sizeable Muslim community in the barangay.

<sup>713</sup> An arrangement commonly used in the Philippines by public transport drivers of jeepneys, tricycles, multi-cabs, small buses, and taxis, whereby an amount is paid to the operator/owner on a daily basis. Gas is usually the driver's expense, while maintenance expenses of the vehicle are often shouldered by the operator/owner. In 1990, boundary was about 60 pesos from 5 p.m. to 6 a.m., according to Amadeo, interview with author, 6 April 2013, at GK Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City.

<sup>714</sup> Filipino, lit. "standby," someone who is unemployed. However, this term has a negative connotation in that an *istambay* is good-for-nothing, a term usually used in reference to a man who does not earn a living.

<sup>715</sup> Filipino, lit. small retail neighbourhood store that usually sells snacks, candies, and basic food items.

rivers commonly flooded in the past after torrential rain, these overflows were considered *gamay ra* (small/minor). As the communities became larger and more people built closer to the rivers, the waterways of the Anilao and Malbasag became narrower, more constricted, and increasingly clogged with human waste. The two rivers were made practically invisible due to “the sheer number of houses, the houses that were narrow there, just crammed full with houses.”<sup>716</sup> The real peril, however, came from the fact that most of the families that resided in these riverbanks earned only minimum daily wages, and had no safety nets when inevitable tragedies came about. And misfortunes did occur, lending credence to the argument that disasters for the poor and vulnerable occur on a regular basis,<sup>717</sup> with some events more financially and materially devastating than others. There was super Typhoon Ruping (Mike) in November 1990 that destroyed some houses and livelihoods along the two rivers. In January 1991, just nine months prior to the November flash flood, a fire ravaged Badlas in Barangay Don Felipe Larrazabal, a notorious pocket of slum houses along the Anilao River. One grandmother’s recollection points to the staggered impacts of these series of disasters, calling into question the ability of families to repeatedly cope and stand on their feet and rebuild their lives:

**Resbeta:** We had a fire that time! Including our house!...Our house was completely burned down...There were close to 200 houses [that were also burned down]...

**Author:** So on November 5 (1991) your house was new?

**Resbeta:** New! When it was washed away it was new, not even finished yet! We wanted to raise it a bit [from the ground], it was not

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<sup>716</sup> Buboy, interview with author, 4 April 2013, at GK provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>717</sup> See, for example, B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon and I. Davis (eds), *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People’s Vulnerability and Natural Disasters* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Also A. Varley, “The exceptional and the everyday: Vulnerability analysis in the international decade for natural disaster reduction,” in *Disasters, Development and Environment*, ed. A. Varley (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto and Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), 1-11.

completed yet, we were doing it gradually as the government was helping us ...so it was not finished yet.<sup>718</sup>

The impacts of personal tragedies were also often considered in the same class as destruction caused by natural hazards, in that both had devastating economic consequences. Most of the urban poor families living along the two rivers prior to 1991 had experienced deaths of fathers and mothers that meant the end of primary or secondary schooling, or the illness of one or both parents who had been the main source of income, which plunged the family into a vicious cycle of debt and poverty. The abrupt break in children's education, the premature entry into the labor market, early co-habitation with someone equally destitute, the raising of numerous children they could scarce afford, and the succession of small jobs that often did not pay enough to support a family, these developments characterized *kinabuhì nga lisod kaayo* (an onerous life). Felicidad, a fifty-four year old single mother who had quit school after Grade Four to start working at age fourteen, used to regularly send home some money in her early life to help tide her family over in Barangay Mabini along the Anilao River. When asked why she did not finish elementary school, she said matter-of-factly, "It was difficult in those days because my mother did not have a job."<sup>719</sup> On how much she was earning as *palabantay* (caretaker) of a family's apartment in Bulacan where she worked, Felicidad said,

**Felicidad:** Thirty [pesos].

**Author:** In a month?

**Felicidad:** Yes...in 1968.

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<sup>718</sup> Resbeta, interview with author, 24 April 2013, in her own home, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>719</sup> Felicidad, interview with author, 19 April 2013, in the multi-purpose hall, Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, translated to Filipino by Victor Arcuiño during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by author. She was in Bulacan when the flash flood in 1991 occurred and immediately came home to look for her family. Her mother, Salustiana, who was also interviewed for this research, worked as a laundrywoman prior to 1991. At 78, Salustiana was a little deaf and, according to Felicidad, was suffering from Alzheimer's, although during the interview she appeared lucid though a bit hard of hearing. She was also very unkempt as though she had not been bathed for weeks, very stooped and thin.

**Author:** What can you buy for thirty pesos? Do you give money to your mother?

**Felicidad:** Yes...My *amo*<sup>720</sup> in Meycauayan [Bulacan] said do not go home, we will just send the money and Ma Ling<sup>721</sup> ma'am that was cheap then.

**Author:** How much was it?

**Felicidad:** Five centavos!...I send one carton ma'am because my *amo* does not want me to go home to Ormoc so we send it through a neighbor.

**Author:** When the neighbor goes home?

**Felicidad:** Yes, one carton ma'am of Ma Ling, clothes, money, things like that.<sup>722</sup>

Divina, who had to stop her education after graduating from elementary school and the death of her mother, went on to work as a child laborer in a *katubhan* (sugarcane estate) in Camotes Island just across the waters from Ormoc.<sup>723</sup> She remembers that, after earning 2.50 pesos per day, she would go and buy rice for the family:

**Divina:** A *ganta*<sup>724</sup> [of rice that time] was two [pesos]...So every day I had fifty centavos left.

**Author:** Where do you go to spend the fifty centavos?

**Divina:** I gave it to my father. Yes, I gave because we were very poor then. There were so many children.<sup>725</sup>

Yet, those who did not pursue secondary education often had children that repeated the same pattern. Rebecca was seventeen in 1991 when she

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<sup>720</sup> Filipino, lit. employer.

<sup>721</sup> Ma Ling is an ubiquitous brand of processed luncheon meat produced in Hong Kong, similar to Spam.

<sup>722</sup> Felicidad, interview with author, 19 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Bisaya, lit. sugarcane field.

<sup>724</sup> Filipino, lit. unit of grain measure equivalent to three (3) liters.

<sup>725</sup> Divina, interview with author, 5 April 2013, Ibid. Divina lost her mother at a very young age, which prompted her to leave school early.

ran away from Cebu to be with her then twenty-one year old boyfriend in Ormoc. The seventh of thirteen children of a *mananagat* (fisherman) father and a fish vendor mother, she eventually had four boys of her own, with the three eldest dropping out of high school “because of *barkada* (gang of friends) joining the *istambays* who are typical here [in Tambulilid].”<sup>726</sup> Amadeo, a forty-six year old man debilitated at home with what appeared to be an advanced stage of gout and who had only a high school diploma, had four children with ages ranging from five to twenty-one years. Except for the five-year old who was still enrolled in day-care and the third child who just graduated from high school, the two older children reached only second year high school and then went on to do odd jobs. When asked why the eldest had dropped out of school, Amadeo replied simply, “...He helps me because I can no longer drive [the tricycle].”<sup>727</sup> The conscription of children into the informal labor market to help augment the family income meant that they were doomed to lower wages for the rest of their lives, if no intervention was introduced, thereby condemning their future families in the same cycle of poverty.

Makeshift houses along the riverbanks of Anilao and Malbasag reflected the urban poor/squatter family’s impoverishment, ubiquitous in the practise of the *tapak-tapak* method that one Tambulilid resident ingenuously noted. This technique called for patching a house with whatever scrap materials became available, as “when my father finds plywood he would patch it over a hole.”<sup>728</sup> This gave the houses a semblance of disrepair typical of slums.

Formal identification as squatters, however, was not only an objective process signified by a state looking at these communities as a dangerous problem of social order and urban planning. It was often also a subjective

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<sup>726</sup> Rebecca, interview with author, 24 April 2013, in her own home, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Bisaya, translated to Filipino by Victor Arcuiño during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by author, when asked why her three sons aged 21, 19 and 17 only reached second year high school.

<sup>727</sup> Amadeo, interview with author, 6 April 2013, in his own home, GK Village, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Bisaya, translated to Filipino by Victor Arcuiño during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by author. Amadeo was a tricycle driver on a *boundary* basis.

<sup>728</sup> Felicidad, interview with author, 19 April 2013, Ibid.

dialectic process internalized by residents who had accepted the term to refer to themselves and their homes. Buboy, who was newly married in 1991 with a baby aged a year and two months, lived with his wife's family in Barangay Alegria along the Anilao River. He recounts:

...We are fine there in that area though it is in what was called *the squatters area*, we were in the suburb part of the city divided by a river. It was called the Anilao River. It was before you entered the city (emphasis added).<sup>729</sup>

### **Resettlement for urban squatter survivors**

After 1991, priority for resettlement was given to those whose houses were *hurot tanan* (completely destroyed), including surviving Isla Verde residents who numbered only about 200 from an original population of 2,500. They also included about 200 Muslim residents who had been adversely affected along Mabini Nasunugan,<sup>730</sup> Mabini Circle, Sabang, and Maraviles Compound in Don Felipe, all situated along the Anilao River.<sup>731</sup> These survivors were mostly resettled in clusters organized by various agencies, such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) through the Core Shelter settlement, Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI), PhilRads, Holy Wings, and other non-government organizations, as well as private entities and individuals.

The largest resettlement area was RAFI, with eight hectares divided into eight sub-*puroks*,<sup>732</sup> which was originally established for relief or starter houses beginning in December 1991 and completed in February 1992. The 1992 law on housing, or Republic Act No. 7279, defines resettlement areas as sites identified by a central government agency to be used for the

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<sup>729</sup> Buboy, interview with author, 4 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>730</sup> The name "Nasunugan" itself means that this area had been razed by fire in the past.

<sup>731</sup> Salem Pundato, barangay *kagawad* (councillor), interview with author, 5 June 2013, at the Barangay Hall, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Filipino. Imam Mackay, who was current *imam* at Mabini Nasunugan but who was not himself present in November 1991, estimates that Muslims in Ormoc in 1991 numbered about 2,000. Imam Mackay, interview with author, 28 May 2013, at the Mosque, Barangay Nasunugan, Ormoc City, in Filipino.

<sup>732</sup> Filipino, lit. division within the territory of a barangay. Along with *sitios*, a *purok* is considered the smallest Philippine political unit.



relocation of the underprivileged and homeless.<sup>733</sup> It must be noted here that RAFI communities comprised the biggest *puroks* with the most number of households in Tambulilid. In a 2008 population count, the DSWD Core Shelter community where Muslim families were resettled had 281 households with 1,586 individuals, while RAFI communities in *puroks* 11, 12 and 13 had a collective of 669 households, with a total of 3,633 individuals.<sup>734</sup> These three *puroks* comprise the bulk of Tambulilid residents. However, while the RAFI resettlement area was commonly believed by survivor-residents to have been purchased by the organization as part of its operations in 1991, Dominica Chua, RAFI's current Chief Operating Officer (COO), clarifies that this was not actually the case:

**Dominica Chua:** Actually I had nothing to do with the titling. Our organization was just asking for a relocation site from the city government. I think for that one, I got some letters from those people living in there because they're asking from us for the title...

**Author:** For help?

**Chua:** Yes for help and really obtaining the title from the city government. But it belongs to the city government. I did not, we did not bought the lot.

**Author:** But it was just named after RAFI?

**Chua:** The title?

**Author:** No, the area is just named after RAFI?

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<sup>733</sup> The 1992 law on housing, Republic Act No. 7279, defines resettlement areas as those "areas identified by the appropriate national agency or by the local government unit with respect to areas within its jurisdiction, which shall be used for the relocation of the underprivileged and homeless citizens. On the other hand, underprivileged and homeless citizens are defined as "individuals or families residing in urban and urbanizable areas whose income or combined household income falls within the poverty threshold as defined by the National Economic and Development Authority and who do not own housing facilities. This shall include those who live in makeshift dwelling units and do not enjoy security of tenure."

<sup>734</sup> Barangay Tambulilid City Hall, *Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) Comprehensive Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (CMDP) 2012-2014*, 5.

**Chua:** They were the ones who named it after RAFI! It was not us by the way! I was even surprised. The reason why I went back there was because they told me that whenever you go there, and then you have to ride the tricycle just tell them *sitio* RAFI, *barrio* RAFI. So I was like *ha?* It was them who named it after RAFI because it was us who was there. But the land, no! We don't own that. You know for record purposes we don't own the land. It was the city government who obtained that lot...It was the government who bought the land.<sup>735</sup>

The issue of who owned these lands and in whose name the title was ceded in 1992 became ever more critical in relation to the issue of land privatization. For the remaining flood survivors who still reside in Tambulilid today and who had been cash-strapped before and certainly after the flood, titling was an expensive process few could afford, as Barangay Captain Roca succinctly explains:

**Barangay Captain Roca:** There are more [migrants] now because past owners, those who were recipients of house and lots here already left, some died, their houses were sold. In my view [the percentage of flood survivors vis-à-vis new migrants] is maybe 50-50. There are few of the original [survivors] here.

**Author:** Most of those I have talked to have no titles because the lots were given by the NGOs.<sup>736</sup>

**Roca:** No, the regulation here is that the lot will be transferred in twenty-five years if you are not the recipient. But if you were really the recipient from the flash flood, automatically you can have it titled.

**Author:** Ah so it is theirs, they can already—why is it they do not know this?

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<sup>735</sup> Ibid. Chua provided a copy of the title that the city government gave to RAFI for a 57,085 square meter parcel of land where the organization could build its starter houses. It should be noted here, however, that the title refers to land, located not in Barangay Tambulilid, but in fact Barangay Linao, which was another relocation site.

<sup>736</sup> This perception was in fact erroneous. While some NGOs had indeed bought parcels of land with their own funding, the bulk of Tambulilid that had been utilized as resettlement area was bought by the city government.

**Roca:** They do know, others will say they are the owners when they are not, they just bought it. It is recorded. When you get a certification of ownership, that you want to have it titled, the records will be checked at the City Hall, if it is not there you are not the original recipient.

**Author:** It is because most of those I asked what evidence they had in their possession, the evidence they have is only a piece of paper from the DSWD stating the release of materials, only that.

**Roca:** It is because it is there really identified in the Master List. If you are really the owner, even right now you can have it titled.

**Author:** This is possible?

**Roca:** You can have it titled, yes. But if you just bought it, wait at least twenty-five years.

**Author:** It is because the way I understood it, they did not know this.

**Roca:** They know, they know! They even established an association here and contributed some money for titling. Now only those with money—most of the original [recipients] did not have money, the new migrants that had bought the lots had money. There they contributed. At the City Hall, their names did not appear so [the titling] did not push through.

**Author:** So what happens then if for example you had already put up a large house?<sup>737</sup>

**Roca:** It is not a problem because you have a waiver, there is a waiver from the original [recipient] that you bought it, you have a waiver saying all your rights had already been transferred to them, everything, you do not have any claim anymore. Also, for example you bought it and built a big house, just wait for twenty-five years.

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<sup>737</sup> The construction of large houses was in fact not the norm in Barangay Tambulilid. For original flood survivor-recipients, the houses were smaller and made of more modest materials.

**Author:** The twenty-five years started at what year?

**Roca:** Starting when it was awarded.

**Author:** Which is 1992?

**Roca:** Maybe 1993, '92. [Twenty-five years] is approaching.<sup>738</sup>

The reality of having few economic means to secure land created a profound sense of uncertainty for families already struggling with the daily concerns of barely making a living. As a consequence, rumors abounded, unfounded opinions created more fear and doubt, and in all these types of discourses ran a thread of fatalism and hopelessness:

...what people here were asking where is the title as we may just be made unknown here. We are still squatters here! We don't have papers!...When we went to the mayor the mayor said they will give papers but the houses must be rebuilt. It's hard they said if the houses are very close to each other. If they give papers when the area is small, [the process of titling] will be lengthy! It was Vicky [referring to the former mayor, Victoria Locsin] who said when there were still no houses there were no papers to hold onto but rebuild the houses farther apart about eighty meters, what is it, eighty meters! That was what they said but it was not possible anymore, as some had already concreted their houses!...If someone else pays we will be removed from here! We won't have a house because we are only squatters here! That's what's going to happen ma'am when you don't have any papers.<sup>739</sup>

A grandmother, whose children had all become professionals, with one son she proudly said was sending her money regularly as a seaman abroad, when asked if she had a title to her lot, muses:

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<sup>738</sup> Barangay Captain Ronaldo Roca, interview with author, 28 May 2013, in Tambulilid, on the question of the percentage of flood survivors vis-à-vis new migrants in Tambulilid and what the process was for titling, in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>739</sup> Resbeta, interview with author, 24 April 2013, Ibid.

**Elizabeth:** None, that is it we really do not have. They said you could live here till whenever you want. But if they want to drive us away from here, they can...

**Author:** Do you think you will retire here?

**Elizabeth:** Yes I want to if that is possible, if the Rotarians do not make us leave.<sup>740</sup>

Yet, all resettled families did not collectively share the experience of land insecurity. Two *puroks*, namely Purok 7 organized by the NGO Holy Wings and Purok 8 by PhilRads, had already started the transfer of land to their recipients. However, the three sites where the majority of households belong—Puroks 11, 12 and 13—all RAFI settlements, remained without legal titles.

### **Not land ownership but land occupancy**

Gawad Kalinga,<sup>741</sup> a popular movement run by volunteers primarily concerned with building houses for the urban poor in general, entered Tambulilid in 2004. It adopted a village formerly established by the Rotary, gridded the area according to its model of a community clustered around a public open space, and organized residents with volunteers to build and in some cases re-construct existing houses following the ubiquitous GK prototypical house, as GK representatives describe:

**Roberto Igot:** Actually [the house] is about twenty meters only with two rooms for kids and for the master, for parents, there is a CR [comfort room] and kitchen and living room.

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<sup>740</sup> Elizabeth, interview with author, 6 April 2013, in her own home, GK Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Filipino, when asked if the family had a title to the house and lot. The Rotary Club of Ormoc originally bought the parcel of land in Tambulilid for distribution to the 1991 survivors/urban poor families. The community was later adopted by Gawad Kalinga.

<sup>741</sup> Gawad Kalinga (lit. to 'give care') grew out of the Catholic community Couples for Christ's (CFC) program for the poor. It was conceptualized after a youth camp on 26 December 1995 involving the delinquent youth in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City, which was then the largest slum area in the Philippines. Today, Gawad Kalinga is an independent movement from the CFC though members of the two commonly support each other's activities. Calling itself a social movement rather than an NGO, Gawad Kalinga is based on a volunteering program aimed at ending poverty in the Philippines for five million families by 2024.

**Kevin Caballero:** Small *sala*.

**Igot:** Yes a small living room with like a porch that is also small. And also they have, aside from the house lot, that is the floor area which is about fifty...

**Caballero:** About fifty to sixty [square meters].

**Igot:** ...to sixty, which will differ depending on the availability of land. When it is more urban, land is more expensive so the yard is not as big. There is a front-, side- and back [yard].

**Caballero:** In the urban [area] it is only forty [square meters].<sup>742</sup>

In these two villages, the issue of land tenure was circumvented through the distribution and signing of certificates of occupancy, rather than land titles that assigned rights to beneficiaries except the right to sell. It was a program that aimed to effectively cut the cycle of land distribution-reselling- and re-squatting, a common occurrence among those who had been recipients of public and private housing programs in urban areas. In this case, Gawad Kalinga mediated between the local government and the private land donor to organize a community for the poorest of the poor in a basically top-down process of community development:

**Igot:** Well in our view the government is also doing its role, what it should do. But in our view, in Gawad Kalinga's view, poverty is a very big issue, a very big problem. Poverty is like a monster in our country...It's a big problem which requires a big answer and in GK's view the government cannot act on its own...That is why Gawad Kalinga thinks that instead of bashing government, instead of you know blaming officials and all, what if we help government. This is why Tito Tony said [referring to Antonio Meloto, GK's Chairman of the Board and 'father' of Gawad Kalinga] that yes, we see corruption and all, but instead of condemning them try to work with them, because we

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<sup>742</sup> Roberto 'Buboy' Igot and Kevin Caballero, GK representatives, simultaneous interviews with author, 11 March 2013, at SPDOWFI, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, in Filipino and English.

know that there is a certain percentage of goodness in their heart...Actually we are about 2600 communities nationwide today in Gawad Kalinga. But Gawad Kalinga does not own one square meter...What happens is that the donors we inspire to give are told to donate the land not to us but directly to the local government or any government entity. That is our process. We do not accept land. We only facilitate. But we have to ensure that the evidence, the legalities will really protect Gawad Kalinga's interest and also those of people we serve...So now what Gawad Kalinga does is tell the mayor...that there is someone who wants to donate to Gawad Kalinga, we deem it right that the donation is made there, explain the same thing and [the mayor will just] accept, but we also have our own Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

**Author:** With the government?

**Igot:** With the government represented by whoever, the barangay chairman, or the mayor or the governor. So...the donor has an instrument called a deed of donation, that it will be donated to the mayor. But on the condition that your donation, which is stipulated, that this particular piece of land, parcel of land can only be used...exclusively for Gawad Kalinga Community Development. Otherwise...it will revert back to the owner without any court litigation if it is used by other than Gawad Kalinga. So that is the protection. When it is signed by the mayor, when it is already notarized, anytime, there is no court litigation. We also have a MOA, a Memorandum of Agreement, [the donor has] the Deed of Donation, we have the Memorandum of Agreement that this land, it's like it is only repeated, that this land is for Gawad Kalinga and we are the authorized implementer of the program. It's like we are also the representative of the local government and also the interest of the donor. So here, in this side, this land that Gawad Kalinga was allowed to use we are the caretakers, we oversee it and really manage and follow the provisions that are in the Memorandum of Agreement that whoever is the mayor, or the [barangay] captain, it is continuous and they are not politicized

[referring to the beneficiaries]. They [referring to beneficiaries] could not be driven away if you don't vote for me. There is none of that. It's because every site there are caretaker teams who also know their responsibilities...So that is the protection of people who live here. Normally, we do not give the lot...we call it the awarding only of a certificate of occupancy.<sup>743</sup>

The rationale behind Gawad Kalinga's practice of distributing deeds of occupancy is further explained, which has proven effective in its numerous urban poor communities all over the country:

**Igot:** In the Philippines, in truth the government has not lacked in the effort to provide [lots]. But what happens is that the government has given 1,000 homes [but] by tomorrow there will be different owners. The owner is no longer the poor family because it was already sold. Ah you know it saddens us but...this is what truly happens. When you go to what we call the relocation site in Tambulilid, the real flash flood victims won't reach twenty per cent anymore. Because they sold them. The lands came from the government. Now Gawad Kalinga does not like that to happen because we want that when a house is awarded it should be...one less squatter family that should happen. So now Gawad Kalinga's strategy that Kevin was talking about when there is someone who looks for land, we just encourage those who have tracts of land, the landed or organizations or the local government, that those who will use their land will partner with Gawad Kalinga through a Memorandum of Agreement. So we call that a usufruct, usufructory in fifty years and renewable. That is because it's not necessary to donate land to Gawad Kalinga. Because if it is donated to us, we are also private, we will be taxed by government but we are not into business. For me, this is the main work of government. We are just helping. The land can come from private or can come from government but just the same instrument. To ensure that the people are not politicized, we enter into a Memorandum of

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<sup>743</sup> Ibid.



Agreement. So it is under term. For example, this here in Tambulid, this with the government, that is under usufruct. The one in Rotary, a civic organization, that was private, that wasn't donated to us but it was put under a Memorandum of Agreement. It is called a MOA...this instrument is to ensure that the people will be protected, that is to say their stay, their tenure. Just imagine that they are entitled to stay there for fifty years and renewable. It is like it was also given to them.

**Author:** That means if for example the original owners after forty years, forty or fifty years, they want the land back it is possible to demand it back?

**Igot:** No because it is stipulated there in the instrument that...unless Gawad Kalinga does not fulfil the agreement the way we implement programs, they have the right. As long as we really implement properly and follows those that had been signed into the Memorandum of Agreement, Gawad Kalinga will continue its priority in case it reaches fifty years. Now maybe Gawad Kalinga also considers that perhaps time will come that when the owner wants to subdivide or maybe our residents can afford to pay in instalments or pay—look it's fifty years. So what happens is that the stability or security of their tenure comes from our instrument and the Gawad Kalinga will never start up an area for development without these instruments because that's also our, like, our security and to secure the people whom we are serving. You know what it's like in the Philippines.<sup>744</sup>

In truth, however, while the idea behind the concept of distributing certificates of occupancy is admirable, the issue of land insecurity has continued to prove intractable and is not truly resolved for the benefit of those who needed the land the most. Ultimately, it is an indirect way for landowning families to continue to claim possession of the land, while abrogating their civic duty temporarily by allowing Gawad Kalinga to organize and develop new communities, where residents in the end may end up as future housing clients when the land is eventually developed.

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, Gawad Kalinga has strong advocates and critics in its work in community building and poverty alleviation. Advocates typically exhort its extraordinary ability to gather “a massive army of volunteers” from around the world against its “war on poverty,” its powerful branding as an indigenous and ingenious Filipino development organization, its hip “social entrepreneurship” and “social innovation” programs, and its implications to governance, among others.<sup>745</sup> Critics, however, have questioned the fundamental principles of Gawad Kalinga’s work, anchored on its heavily patronizing approach to poverty, which it defines as a mindset<sup>746</sup> rather than as a real economic condition, its strong articulation and evangelization of Christian values to its beneficiaries, and its ‘voluntourism’.<sup>747</sup> GK’s founder himself, Tony Meloto, has been accused of sexism and racism.<sup>748</sup>

Nonetheless, GK recipients who belonged to the most destitute of urban poor families in the two communities in Ormoc City expressed their

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<sup>745</sup> See, for instance, M.C. Doyo, “The genius of the Filipino poor,” Opinion, *Inquirer.net*, 20 November 2014 (Online); T. Graham, *The Genius of the Poor: An Englishman’s Life-Changing Journey in the Philippines* (Art Angel Printshop Commercial Quests, Inc., 2014); A. Brillantes and M. Fernandez, “Good governance, social quality and active citizenship: Gawad Kalinga in the Philippines,” *International Journal of Social Quality* (1 December 2011), 1-19 (Online); A. Brillantes, Jr. and M. Fernandez, “Philippine public administration? Or better still, for whom is Philippine public administration?” presented at the public colloquium, *Is there a Philippine Public Administration: A Timeless Issue*, University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance, 26-27 June 2008; and, R. Habaradas and M.L. Aquino, “Towards innovative, livable, and prosperous Asian megacities, Gawad Kalinga: Innovation in the city (And beyond),” AKI Working Paper No. 10-01C (Manila: Angelo King Institute, De La Salle University, August 2010).

<sup>746</sup> See J.L. Oquiñena, “Ending the poverty mindset,” *How We End Poverty, Gawad Kalinga*, accessed 15 January 2017 (Online). Yet this argument is hardly unique to Gawad Kalinga, see for instance, B. Hare, “Viewpoint: Poverty is a state of mind,” Magazine, *BBC News*, 28 November 2012 (Online).

<sup>747</sup> See, for example, S. Claudio, “Gawad Kalinga: Time for an independent assessment,” *Rappler*, 1 June 2015 (Online). Claudio, in particular, criticizes Gawad Kalinga’s reinforcement of “sexist conceptions about families—namely, that men were to be the final decision makers and their wives were supposed to obey them and support them.” In addition, in keeping with its Christian principles, unmarried and non-heterosexual couples were denied housing and contraceptives were banned in the GK communities. Also Z. Panol and M. Sison, “International public relations and the circuit of culture: An analysis of *Gawad Kalinga* (original emphasis),” *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal* Vol. 14 Nos. 1 and 2 (Australia: Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2014), 51-68.

<sup>748</sup> See, for instance, R. Macasero, “Make ‘cappuccino’ kids? GK’s Tony Meloto slammed for ‘sexist’ remarks,” *Rappler*, 25 May 2015 (Online). Also E. Howard, “Across the Philippines, Gawad Kalinga provides shelter from the storms,” *The Guardian*, 27 May 2016 (Online). Howard, in particular, documents a statement made by Meloto: “Our women are motivated to study. Our men are not. That is the state of our development. When you’re poor you look more at physical strength to develop. You’d rather be into guns, drugs or drinking. So these girls will have to marry men with lesser qualifications than them. What kind of future am I going to give them if I don’t also motivate the men?”

deepest gratitude for the gift of a house. Merlita, who was a beneficiary of two land resettlement programs—the first one after 1991 from the city government, which she sold after her husband fell ill and eventually died of kidney failure, and the second from Gawad Kalinga, considers her current house as another lease on life, a gift from God.<sup>749</sup> Papenuncia, aged seventy-three and now living alone, says being given a house was the “arrival of luck.”<sup>750</sup> Felicidad, whose parents were first given a house and lot at the resettlement area organized by the Red Cross in Bliss, Barangay Bagong Buhay in 1992 but which was also later sold, became a recipient herself through Gawad Kalinga. She says she wants to grow old in Block 7, the poorest sub-*purok* in Tambulilid:

Because it is only now that I am residing where I like...I thought I was bound for Manila, I was lucky to come here when it was a house I was looking for because my mother when she doesn't want [the house] anymore, for example, she sells it. Money you get only once but a house is always there.<sup>751</sup>

Tambulilid's recent rapid rise in population—5,798 with 1,176 households in 2000; 8,227 in 2007; 8,387 with 1,701 households in 2008; and 9,136 with 1,711 households or 2,019 families in 2011<sup>752</sup>—showed a burgeoning community comprised predominantly of poor households with extended families living together in confined quarters. It is notable that in a population count undertaken in 2008, the *puroks* with the highest population densities were resettlement areas. These were Purok 3 (DSWD) with 1,586 individuals living in 281 households; Purok 11 (Blocks 3, 7 and 8 of RAFI) with 1,515 individuals in 269 households; Purok 13 (Blocks 1, 2 and 4 of

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<sup>749</sup> Merlita, interview with author, 5 April 2013, at the GK provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Filipino.

<sup>750</sup> Papenuncia, interview with author, 16 April 2013, in her own home, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in mixed Filipino and Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author: “We were given a house here. A small one because it was mud here beneath. This was mud...Then GK came. They asked if we wanted to have a house. I said only one question, yes!...*Sus* Lord how else were we going to have a peaceful house? So luck had arrived.”

<sup>751</sup> Felicidad, interview with author, 19 April 2013, in Filipino.

<sup>752</sup> Department of Education (DepEd)-Region VIII, *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, *Ibid.*, Appendix 2a; and, Liga ng mga Barangay, *Barangay Governance Performance Management System*, as of 1 April 2013.

RAFI) with 1,163 individuals in 219 households; and Purok 12 (Blocks 5 and 6 of RAFI) with 955 individuals in 181 households.

Again in a 2011 barangay survey, 600 families or 29.72 per cent out of a total 2,019 families<sup>753</sup> were found subsisting below the food threshold of 11,686 pesos.<sup>754</sup> Half of these, or 993 comprising 19.47 per cent of the total number of families, were above the food threshold but still below the poverty threshold pegged at 16,841 pesos.<sup>755</sup> Of the total population of 1,711 households in 2011, 49.7 per cent were classified as squatter households, with 33.14 per cent without access to safe drinking water, and 6.84 per cent without access to a sanitary toilet. While the barangay has one elementary school, the estimated number enrolled from Grades One to Six in school year 2010-2011 was only 109.<sup>756</sup> In contrast, the total barangay population aged six to twelve numbered 1,474.<sup>757</sup>

The lack of basic amenities and services like provision of potable water in resettlement areas had already been identified as early as 1994, when residents had to buy drinking water from “water men” who peddled a four-liter gallon for three pesos.<sup>758</sup> In the Gawad Kalinga villages, those who could afford to pay were able to have water piped directly into their houses.

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<sup>753</sup> Liga ng mga Barangay, *Barangay Governance Performance Management System*, Table 11. “*Kita kada buwan ng pamilyang barangay*,” (Family income per month in the barangay). However, it must be noted here that the validity of these figures generated by the Barangay Governance Performance Management System cannot be ascertained and guaranteed, as there are doubts about the reliability and rigor in terms of survey collection, methodology and encoding.

<sup>754</sup> The food threshold (in pesos) refers to “the minimum income required to meet basic food needs and satisfy the nutritional requirements set by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) to ensure that one remains economically and socially productive. It is used to measure extreme or subsistence poverty. Poverty threshold is a similar concept, expanded to include basic non-food needs such as clothing, housing, transportation, health and education expenses. See Philippine Statistics Authority, “Poverty situation in Eastern Visayas, 3 in every 10 families in Eastern Visayas are poor,” *Special Release* SN-SR-201611-26 (Regional Statistical Services Office VIII, 6 December 2016) (Online).

<sup>755</sup> Interestingly, in the Tambulilid figures for the *Barangay Governance Performance Management System*, 1,026 households or 50.82 of the sample of 2,019 households were above the poverty threshold.

<sup>756</sup> Barangay Tambulilid City Hall, *Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) Comprehensive Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (CMDP)*, 2012-2014, 7.

<sup>757</sup> Liga ng mga Barangay, *Barangay Governance Performance Management System*, Ibid., Table 1, “*Populasyon ng barangay ayon sa edad at kasarian*” (Population of the barangay according to age and sex). This figure points to a substantial number of these children either studying in other schools, which implies additional costs to parents who must spend for transport, or not going to school at all.

<sup>758</sup> Benedicto, “Scars remain, trauma lingers.”

But for those who could not, they relied on artesian wells or bought water retailed by peddlers for their daily supply.<sup>759</sup> In terms of electricity, a small percentage of families remain without electricity, as the GK representative pointed out:

It is because included in the GK development that we made, we make sure that electric lines are available but they have to apply on their own because that is part of our training to them in order to give them back their dignity as persons that they should learn how to exert effort. That is included in our provision. So we just make sure that the facilities are available so...if [we are talking about the] urban poor we are more specific because we want [to target] the poorest of the poor, the victims of calamities. So that is what we focus on. Urban and rural [poor] so long as they need and want to help us, it will be easier to establish a community.<sup>760</sup>

Sustainable livelihoods were also in short supply, a situation that persisted since 1995 when it was first raised as an issue for resettled communities in Ormoc. According to Teresita Baylon, who was *barangay kagawad*<sup>761</sup> in Tambulilid at that time, ‘masiao’ and ‘last-two’ and other forms of illegal gambling abounded for lack of jobs.<sup>762</sup> In the aftermath of the disaster, some groups of men and women, without money with which to participate in these illegal games, instead gambled with donated sardines and canned goods.<sup>763</sup> In fact, people got so fed up with the canned goods they got as donations that some of them in Tambulilid would barter these

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<sup>759</sup> Roberto Igot and Kevin Cabellero, simultaneous interviews with author, 11 March 2013, *Ibid.* on the question of water source: “Faucet but not yet everyone. This time it is like they have to look for their own to tap into the water system of the city. But at least it’s available in the community. [Author: So it means they have to pay on their own?] Yes, they have to. [Author: Those who could not pay, those without any means, where do they source?] What happens is they have a well. [Kevin: Artesian well] From the well and also they buy. It is cheaper when it is in retail. [Author: How much?] Ten pesos per container. [Author: Five gallons?] Yes, five gallons. So or sometimes, two families share and pay for one faucet. It is their *diskarte* (own way). That is because we agreed in the partnership with local government that not everything will be provided because we saw that it is more of the shelter that we directly assist them with.”

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>761</sup> Filipino, lit. councillor.

<sup>762</sup> E. Justimbaste, “Ormoc does little to avert another potential disaster,” 46.

<sup>763</sup> L. Jimenea, “Laughter eases pain of flood victims,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 November 1999, 14.

with *kamote* (sweet potato) when farmers from the hinterlands would come down to peddle their crops.<sup>764</sup> The principal sources of livelihood for Tambulilid residents today include farming, fishing, livestock raising, small-sized enterprises, and paid employment in the government or private sector.<sup>765</sup> But a large percentage of the population (or 28.463 per cent) are classified as unemployed aged fifteen to sixty-five years.<sup>766</sup>

Tambulilid today continues to live with a reputation that it is not only a hive of small-time illegal gamblers, but also a melting pot of *bugoy-bugoy*,<sup>767</sup> purse-snatchers, drug addicts, and thieves residing amidst honest folks. Barangay Captain Roca strongly notes that the ill repute was based on Tambulilid being a melting pot:

Those who lived here were really not related to each other, they came from different places and were placed here. That is why in the beginning this place was feared because people had *kanya-kanyang diskarte* (to each his/her own). Years passed, people got along, so there was no [trouble] anymore. Today relations are good. It was only in the beginning.<sup>768</sup>

### **“Original” versus “Migrant”**

Nevertheless, three key issues residents considered as the most persistent and urgent were listed in a barangay report prepared under Roca’s leadership. These issues were “land grabbing, illegal gambling and illegal

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<sup>764</sup> Eunila and Nezele (neighbors), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 April 2013, in Eunila’s own home, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Nezele: “For us we didn’t sell, [but] when someone came to peddle *kamote* we exchanged [Eunila: Exchange] exchanged...sardines, canned goods...exchange with *kamote*...[A female neighbour listening in: Barter]. Eunila: Of course we were so tired of sardines [Nezele: Yes] we exchanged sardines [Nezele: We exchanged rice] because the market was so far away!”

<sup>765</sup> The undated figures generated by the Barangay Hall in this report show that eight (8) percent of the population are engaged in farming, 1.5 percent in fishing, 1.5 percent in livestock raising, 4.5 percent in business, and those who were employed were further classified into 25 percent employed and 40 percent self-employed. However, there are no explanations as to what constituted self-employment especially in comparison with those engaged in business. Unemployment is estimated at 19.5 percent of the population. Barangay Tambulilid City Hall, *Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) Comprehensive Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (CMDP), 2012-2014*, 4.

<sup>766</sup> Liga ng mga Barangay, *Barangay Governance Performance Management System*.

<sup>767</sup> Bisaya, lit. scoundrel, bad guy, bully.

<sup>768</sup> Barangay Captain Ronaldo Roca, interview with author, Ibid., in Filipino, when asked whether Tambulilid had a negative reputation.

drugs”.<sup>769</sup> In addition, stories of petty theft, gambling, drug trafficking and other crimes contribute to a less than rosy reputation, as two of these statements show:

**Elizabeth:** ...it is not one hundred per cent safe here because there are many in Tambulilid, many *akyat-bahay*.<sup>770</sup> We ourselves were robbed. Maybe it was about four in the afternoon, my motorcycle’s CDI [capacitor discharge ignition] was stolen. Even if it is daytime you need to be locked. Someone climbed over so we put padlocks there.

**Author:** Did you see who it was?

**Elizabeth:** Yes! A neighbor. We saw him. So I told him, what are you going to steal from here, I do not have anything. Take the TV!...Here on the other side, the next morning, a neighbor’s laundry was stolen, all her good laundry.<sup>771</sup>

Joan, another resident, muses:

**Joan:** Especially when you forget to take your slippers and shoes in at night.

**Author:** These are still stolen?

**Joan:** It was the *kaldero* (pot) in the beginning [chuckling]...So long as they can get money—metal, cans, everything, so long as money can be got.<sup>772</sup>

While violence can occur anywhere and is not an exclusive characteristic of resettlement areas, it does lend untoward notoriety to these places. In a particularly gruesome incident in 2008, for example, vigilantes took the law into their own hands against someone suspected to have committed rape against a child. The highly congested nature of these areas,

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<sup>769</sup> Barangay Tambulilid City Hall, *Barangay Integrated Development Plan (BIDP) Comprehensive Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (CMDP), 2012-2014*, 9.

<sup>770</sup> Filipino, lit. “go-up-the-house,” a modus operandi of some groups who go over the fence past a locked door to rob a house.

<sup>771</sup> Elizabeth, interview with author, Ibid.

<sup>772</sup> Joan, interview with author, 24 April 2013, in her own home with a *sari-sari* store, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Bisaya, translated to Filipino by Victor Arcuiño during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by the author.

where the walls of one house were already the shared walls of the neighbor, meant private and public lives often intermingled in the street. Amparo, a forty-eight year old widow, narrates the story below, which also unnervingly shows the preconceived notions prevalent about rape:

**Amparo:** ...he was ganged up on by frats<sup>773</sup> here.

**Author:** Why?!

**Amparo:** They suspected him but I told them to wait if it was true or not. They could not wait.

**Author:** Suspected of what?

**Amparo:** There was an abnormal girl here.<sup>774</sup> Then there was a rumor that she was molested, raped. I said if raped...why was the child still playing about? That was a child only twelve years old...the child was not unhappy. The child was just playing about. Of course she was already big enough. Of course she would feel something, would be fidgety. Then I said wait, if you want you can put him in jail first then wait for the medical [exam]. If there is evidence you will not have difficulty arresting him. Then those who oppressed him said some other time because they did not have any evidence yet. What they did when my husband went to our employer, they met him, detained him, ran after him through to Coob Sitio. They ran after him, stoning him.

**Author:** He died by stoning?

**Amparo:** Yes. His neck was injured and his spinal cord was broken.<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> Fraternities or groupings of usually young men.

<sup>774</sup> Verbatim was *abnormal na babae*. The catch-term 'abnormal' is commonly used at the street level to refer to people with mental disabilities, including those with Down Syndrome.

<sup>775</sup> Amparo, interview with author, 26 April 2013, in her own home, Barangay Tambulid, original in Filipino. Amparo explained her husband's death: "He was brought [to the hospital]. What happened with him occurred around maybe ten o'clock [Author: At night?] no, day. At 11 o'clock because I asked for help from the [barangay] *tanods* [barangay peace and security officers] we went to the [barangay] captain, they arrested them, brought them to the police station. When I went there, he had vomited blood. At that time I did not know that he had been stoned...he said Ni, bring papa here because I want to have a massage. He said his body was painful. So I came here! It was then that when he was at the police station no,



Of course, there were also some residents who testify that for many years they had resided there, they had yet to experience being on the receiving end of criminality. According to Rebecca, who has lived in Tambulilid since 1992 and is a *purok* leader in Block 4,

**Rebecca:** For me like I have become familiar here, it is safe as in the past...because I am well-known...Perhaps [those who say Tambulilid was not safe] they were not really pure residents here, they are not pure but just newly lived here.

**Author:** So you have not experienced anything like that?

**Rebecca:** Of course yes...No one does crazy things because those who had been here in the past already know them, maybe they had not been here long, but we have been here since from the flood.<sup>776</sup>

The discourse about ‘pure’ residents versus ‘migrants’ reflects the shaping of post-disaster identity shared by many that an Ormocanon was a survivor, particularly from the great flood.<sup>777</sup> The year 1991 was a turning point, which helped determine the future Ormoc character. Survivors would bear an *uwat* (scar) to show for it, and this entitled them to newfound respect and the material benefits allocated only for them. Migrants were, thus, not real Ormocanons even though they had lived there for a long time, so long as they had not experienced the horror of that November 1991 tragedy.

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he said that the one who beat him up, six of them beat him up, they beat him up, he said, Ser [*n.b.* Sir], like, was my life only going to be till here? He said I will say who did this to me, who beat me. He said this so the police wrote down that there were six of them. I had not yet arrived there. Coming back they called here that, that [Author: Dead on arrival?] yes he was dead on arrival. But they still brought him to the what was it [Author: Hospital] hospital but he was already gone.”

<sup>776</sup> Rebecca (barangay *kagawad* or councillor and 1991 floodsurvivor), interview with author, 24 April 2013, in her own home, Barangay Tambulilid, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>777</sup> For example, Councilor Jose Alfaro and Coloy Tolibao, simultaneous interviews with author, 19 March 2013, in the Ormoc City Hsll, in mixed English and Filipino, transcribed and translated by author: “...most of the people who came here before the flood, there were many who were not from Ormoc. At the time, they survived here in Ormoc, they made well in Ormoc. It is like this is part of the resiliency that they learn how to survive, they learn how to live...People here are survivors. [Coloy: Yes by nature. I said but a while ago, according to some Ormoc would improve after each tragedy. We said let it not happen then, let us not improve (laughs) because after the war the city was totally devastated, after two years it became a chartered city. That time in 1991 after the flood, there were more businesses here].”

## Community empowerment and resilience

To what extent then were the lives of the most vulnerable and poorest sectors of Ormoc society changed because of the flood? For those who were forced by circumstances to persist in Tambulilid, upward social mobility was not an option. Poor people were often less open and willing to move elsewhere in search of better housing and employment opportunities because often, “There is no other choice ma’am.”<sup>778</sup> Nenita, a sixty-year old widow whose married children were still living with her today, says, “We don’t have any plans to go far away because where will we go?”<sup>779</sup> Shared poverty in Tambulilid was certainly better than in other cities like Manila, where rent was exorbitant and life was more uncertain. Not surprisingly, ownership of a house in Tambulilid was often the deciding factor to staying put:

...My son in Cebu told me it would be better to go away from Ormoc. He said Pa, let us sell this house. Where are we heading to, he replied, if we sell our house the money will be gone quickly. *Bahalag* (God willing) that whatever happens we will live right here.<sup>780</sup>

They still could eat rice three times a day, God willing, even without any *sud-an* (viand)<sup>781</sup> or even when they were reduced to eating *ginamos*<sup>782</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Ciceron and Camila (husband and wife), simultaneous interviews with author, 26 April 2013, in their own home, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, on the question of whether they ever thought about leaving Ormoc especially after the flood, transcribed and translated by author. **Camila:** “When it became difficult in Manila, we came back. There is no other choice ma’am. No choice because here there is no rent but in Manila, work in Manila was just a small salary, he was only an imprinter [in a t-shirt printing shop]. I was a sewer.”

<sup>779</sup> Nenita, interview with author, 2 August 2013, in her own home, Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

<sup>781</sup> Esterlita, interview with author, 16 April 2013, in her own home with *sari-sair* store, Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, translated to Filipino by Victor Arcuiño during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by author, on the question of whether anything changed in the kinds of food they now are able to eat and before the flood, transcribed and translated by author: “It is just the same ma’am! [Author: Nothing changed?] God willing only rice ma’am without any viand but we are able to eat.”

<sup>782</sup> Bisaya, lit. fermented fish commonly called *bagoong*. Nezeli and Eunila (neighbors), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino, on the same question posed to Esterlita, transcribed and translated by author: Nezeli: *Ginamos* now just like before when there is no budget.”

or *lugaw*,<sup>783</sup> which were signs that a family was experiencing especially hard times. Amparo remarks:

We became poor when we first moved here. We really became poor because my husband found it very far from Ormoc. Also the road was really difficult. It was not yet cemented before. It was also dusty. We also did not have *pamasahe*.<sup>784</sup> We were really poor at that time. Now we are still poor but we can eat three times a day... Sometimes we eat *lugaw samporado*.<sup>785</sup>

Normal life in post-flood Tambulilid was one of daily struggle similar to the way many had been living before, but it was a life that was *igo-igo ra*, with just enough to live by. The little piece of land upon which the house stood was the best sign of change for Tambulilid survivor-residents, never mind if most of them did not have titles. The flood gave them a house, which was always meant to be a source of comfort in a life that had so few.

Much has been said about “empowered communities” in the wake of disasters, which revolve around notions of coping and “access to safety.”<sup>786</sup> Coping is understood to be a repertoire of strategies adopted by communities to protect and preserve their ways of life, of ensuring that livelihoods and life expectations are not rendered at risk in unusual and adverse situations. The normalization of community life in Barangay Tambulilid, however, points to the transference of systems of interaction from their original urban poor neighborhoods into the resettlement area. Consequently, Tambulilid has evolved into a new urban poor community,

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<sup>783</sup> Filipino, lit. porridge.

<sup>784</sup> Filipino, lit. fare for public transport.

<sup>785</sup> Filipino, lit. chocolate porridge. Amparo, interview with author, 26 April 2013, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author. Amparo further remembers: “I pitied my eldest. He said, we don’t have any [food], let’s ask for some rice. There from the neighbor in front. But if he asked some rice, their roof was also full of patches [*tagpi-tagpi*]. So he said, never mind, let’s not ask from them because their roof had lots of patches maybe they do not have any rice, too!” [chuckling]

<sup>786</sup> Wisner et al define this as a “dynamic framework of socio-economic change, in which people of different identities (gender, age, seniority, class, caste, ethnic group) avail themselves of the means of securing their livelihoods and maintaining their expectations in life.” It is a process that must necessarily be a bottom-up approach because people are “not assumed to be passive recipients of a profile of opportunities, hedged about by constraints of the political economy of which they are a part.” Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon and Davis, *At Risk*, 112-114.

adopting many of its prior characteristics, values and systems of interactions. It remains to be seen whether efforts by the barangay and city government to transform Tambulilid through the introduction of private subdivisions, by way of Camella Homes low-cost housing projects, is successful in removing the stigma of residing in a “resettlement” area.

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## THE RURAL LANDLESS

*We went to the city to ask for rice. Sus someone gave rice. We were too shy to go near so we did not bring anything back.*

- Lorna and Myrna (pseudonyms) (mother and daughter), simultaneous interviews with the author, 19 May 2013, in their own home, Barangay Nalunopan, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author

*This was where [our parents] worked ma'am, that is to make nigo (basket for cleaning rice), to make nigo for our food, to sell for food. They did not have any plans to send their children to school. So when we grew up we did not question our parents. When we were still small we already knew we were too poor to go to school.*

- Berto (pseudonym), interview with author, 14 April 2013, in his own home, Barangay Nalunopan, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author

To get to Barangay Nalunopan<sup>787</sup> from downtown Ormoc, one had to take a short tricycle ride uphill towards the higher elevation settlements. Nalunopan was more than 200 hectares in area with an elevation range of 120 to 140 meters from sea level. Although located only a few kilometers from the city, the barangay itself—where the majority of its residents lived—remained physically isolated and rural, though a road network was being finished in 2013 to link it to the outside world. The most straightforward way to reach Nalunopan was via a paved road passing several surprisingly well-to-do houses, with spacious lawns and well-constructed buildings. Upon asking who owned these houses, the matter-of-fact reply was they were owned by families whose daughters had married foreigners.<sup>788</sup> These small pockets of affluence were both startling and conspicuous.

The paved road passing through Barangay Santo Domingo<sup>789</sup> en route to Nalunopan then led sharply downhill towards a clearing, and ended abruptly, signalling the barangay's boundary. The beginning of the dirt road

<sup>787</sup> Pseudonym, (lit.) flooded.

<sup>788</sup> This perception about 'marrying,' or even just co-habiting with a foreigner as a way out of poverty was pervasive among urban poor families in Leyte. It is discussed in more depth in Chapter 8.

<sup>789</sup> Pseudonym.

was the entrance to the hacienda. Beyond, one could see bamboo trees swaying over *pawod* (thatched) houses, a seemingly idyllic rural panorama. Malinawon<sup>790</sup> creek, a tributary of the Anilao River, snaked placidly across the landscape, where young children frolicked and an occasional carabao basked under the sun. In good weather, one could cross the creek from boulder to boulder without ever getting the feet wet. But during rainy season and, worse, slow-moving typhoons, it could turn deadly. It was the same creek that rose to such abnormal heights and with deadly velocity in November 1991, swept away the *pawod* houses and killed at least thirty individuals, including entire families, in this barangay alone. Yet unlike survivor-beneficiaries who had been resettled in Barangay Tambulilid discussed in the previous chapter, Nalunopan survivors were not considered priorities for government relief and rehabilitation. Because they were deemed under the care of a hacendero who was considered their symbolic father, these laborers and their families, though they had lived in the barangay for at least a generation, were not eligible for resettlement by the government.

This chapter explores the case of laborers under the direct employ of the sugarcane hacienda in Barangay Nalunopan, including those doing a variety of jobs in the *katubhan* (sugarcane fields), as well as those working in the Larrazabal family's various businesses around Ormoc City. It delves into the question of how the 1991 flash flood had impacted on their lives, one of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Ormoc City.

### **Poverty and vulnerability on a hacienda**

Barangay Nalunopan had been historically identified as part of a hacienda barangay both by its residents and by the wider Ormoc society. It became independent in 1951 after separating from a neighboring barangay with a larger land area of about 500 hectares, but which was also sparsely populated. Barangay Nalunopan was divided into five *puroks*,<sup>791</sup> which included the barangay proper, or popularly referred to as the "Barrio," where public buildings were situated, such as the barangay hall and elementary

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<sup>790</sup> Bisaya, lit. calm.

<sup>791</sup> Filipino, lit. division within the territory of a barangay. Along with *sitios*, a *purok* is considered the smallest Philippine political unit.

school. According to its barangay captain, when asked which areas were part of the hacienda and which were not, he replied:

**Barangay Captain Fruto Velardo:** All of it...starting from the low [areas] up to the high [areas], it is all hacienda. Even the barangay proper, the owner owns it.

**Author:** This barangay proper? But these people here have titles? (Referring to a cluster of cement houses)

**Velardo:** No. No.

**Author:** Is there anyone inside Nalunopan who has a title?

**Velardo:** No.

**Author:** So everything is hacienda?

**Velardo:** Hm. Aside from those with *niyog* (coconut trees), those are private, that's theirs. Here, what happened here was that the original owner was Torrevillas, the owner of this land, of other haciendas here. Now this [referring to the barrio] was donated to the barangay but without papers. No deed of donation.

**Author:** When was it donated? In the '70s?

**Velardo:** It was a long time ago, a long time when I was not yet the barangay captain. Now when Torrevillas sold to Sabin Larrazabal, everything was sold including this area in the barangay. So that is why this is theirs.

**Perlita** (a former laborer-resident who had transferred to the new community established by the nuns in Barangay Luna, Purok II-B discussed in the next chapter): So these can just be demolished.

**Velardo:** Yes, of course, at any time.

**Perlita:** So there is nothing written down.

**Velardo:** But Sabin Larrazabal is not like that.<sup>792</sup>

Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz defined a hacienda as,

...an agricultural estate, operated by a dominant land-owner and a dependent labor force, organized to supply a small-scale market by means of scarce capital, in which the factors of production are employed not only for capital accumulation but also to support the status aspirations of the owner.<sup>793</sup>

A hacienda was characterised mainly by capital scarcity, which determined its market (restricted but stable), estate ownership (family, which permitted wealth mobilization through kinship ties and personal networks), land use (rarely exploiting all land under the estate's control), labor (managed through a hierarchical relationship with the landowner as symbolic 'father' and workers as symbolic 'children'), technology (minimal, traditional and limited), and the existence of a private system of sanctions.<sup>794</sup> It was markedly different from a plantation, which was defined as having more capital at its disposal due to its generally more corporate ownership and management. In addition, a plantation supplied a larger scale market than a hacienda, invested more heavily in technology, and dealt with a specialized produce often exported abroad. As such, land and labor were primarily considered inputs for production, indeed commodities, "to be acquired, used and discarded for purely economic reasons."<sup>795</sup>

Nalunopan's population, like in other haciendas, had been controlled historically by controlling the entry and exit of migrant labor and their families, and as such had remained consistently small. In recent years, it had only gradually increased from 685 in year 2000, to 795 in 2007, and 811 in

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<sup>792</sup> Barangay captain Fruto Velardo (pseudonym), interview with author, 28 May 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>793</sup> E. Wolf and S. Mintz, "Haciendas and plantations in Middle America and the Antilles," *Social and Economic Studies* Vol. 6 No. 3 (September 1957), 381. A discussion of the hacienda system as practised in the Philippines is found in M. McLennan, "Land and tenancy in the Central Luzon Plain," *Philippine Studies* Vol. 17 No. 4 (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1969), 651-682.

<sup>794</sup> E. Wolf and S. Mintz, "Haciendas and plantations in Middle America and the Antilles," 386-395.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, 399. This quote, however, was originally used in relation to land, but may also be extended to a view of labor as an input and expense.



2008.<sup>796</sup> In 2011, the barangay had a population of about 860. The majority of residents were in the 25 to 59-age range (33.6 per cent), followed by the 6-12 years (17.7 per cent), and the 3-5 years (9.9 per cent).<sup>797</sup> In that same year, eighty-one households out of a total of 199 were found living below the subsistence threshold set at 11,686 pesos, while forty-nine households were above the food threshold but still below the poverty threshold of 16,841 pesos.<sup>798</sup> Sixty-nine households, however, were noted to be above the poverty threshold.<sup>799</sup>

According to the barangay captain of Nalunopan, residents who were directly employed in the hacienda comprised only thirty per cent of the total population, while the majority derived their livelihood from other means, such as *tuba*-making, construction work, etc.<sup>800</sup> *Hornals* or sugarcane laborers were paid seventy (70) pesos per day, while those who worked as *nagkakaret* or palm tappers for *tuba* earned about 200 pesos per day.<sup>801</sup> Other jobs in the hacienda, such as harvesting cane, planting, and transporting harvested sugarcane to the mill, were paid on a *pakyaw* or piece-work basis. *Pakyaw* for harvesting sugarcane, for example, was set at thirty (30) pesos per one thousand cane cut, higher than an ordinary *horna*'s work, as laborers could easily cut more than a thousand stems of cane per

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<sup>796</sup> Department of Education (DepEd)-Region VIII, "Ormoc City population and number of households (per barangay), year 2000, 2007 and 2008," Appendix 2a, in *Mithi og Bahandi sa Dakbayan sa Ormoc*, 178.

<sup>797</sup> *Liga ng mga Barangay, Barangay Governance Performance Management System, "Populasyon ng Barangay ayon sa edad at kasarian"* (Population of the barangay according to age and sex), Table 1, as of 3 December 2011.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid.

<sup>800</sup> Barangay captain Fruto Velardo (pseudonym), interview with author, Ibid.

<sup>801</sup> Ibid.

day.<sup>802</sup> During harvest, driving a truck paid on average 980 pesos per week per laborer.<sup>803</sup>

It must be noted here that in the barangay, discrimination existed between sugar workers and non-sugar workers. The latter were often considered 'original' residents. Hence they enjoyed more independence because even though they, too, did not possess titles to their land, they were still considered claimants to small plots within the hacienda. Their houses were of more permanent kinds than the laborers', with materials that were stronger against the elements such as cement and galvanized iron. Sugar workers, on the other hand, were seen as primarily migrant labor, and as such were not entitled to any land rights at all. Their houses reflect their destitution, using more flimsy materials such as bamboo and palm roofing that were easily disassembled and re-assembled as required, especially if they had to move away. This fundamental dichotomy about access to and ownership of land remains at the heart of community distrust and apathy against laborer families, and to a large part explains their persistent vulnerability and poverty even after decades of backbreaking work in the hacienda.

Poverty among workers in sugarcane estates in the Philippines had been documented as one of the most resistant to change and intervention. In a June 1976 survey conducted in Negros and Iloilo by a Department of Labor team to determine the socio-economic and working conditions of sugar workers, it was found that eighty (80) per cent of the sample<sup>804</sup> did not own

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<sup>802</sup> Lorna and Myrna (pseudonyms, mother and daughter respectively), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 May 2013, Ibid.: [Author: But when harvesting sugarcane, that is for seven days in one week?] Lorna: Yes. Myrna: Only six. Lorna: Aw six. Nita (former Nalunopan resident): Only six. They get paid on Saturdays. When you do *magtubo* [referring to the *pakyaw* system], you get paid more than if you do work by day. Lorna: Yes, it is more advantageous. [Author: *Pakyaw*?] Lorna: *Pakyaw*. Perlita: It's also *pakyawan* there. Lorna: It is *pakyaw* like before...Nita: So how much per week? Lorna: Thousands! Nita: How much is per thousand? Lorna: Thirty per thousand. Nita: Yes, it is higher than if you do *horna*! Lorna: Big enough.

<sup>803</sup> Ronald Boy (pseudonym), interview with author, 26 April 2013, in his own home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, when asked for an estimate of net earnings for the family: "In my case, for seven days about 980 [pesos]." Ronald Boy works as a driver in the sugarcane estate.

<sup>804</sup> Actual sample comprised of eight milling districts, namely Ma-ao, Biscom, Victorias, Sagay, San Carlos and Bais milling districts in Negros; and New Frontier and Passi milling districts in Iloilo. From these milling districts, 102 sugar plantations were drawn, where 75 of

the land they lived on, and that nine out of ten workers depended directly on their employer for shelter. The majority (66 per cent) of these workers lived in makeshift houses made of *nipa* (palm-thatched) and bamboo. Even among sugar workers, there were those who were considered the worst off, earning less than the minimum wage mandated by the government at that time. This group included small-farm workers, migrant and temporary workers, as well as female laborers. Even then, the earnings of sugar workers were deemed insufficient to meet housing needs, let alone basic requirements such as food and clothing. Thus, they supplemented their meagre income by incurring debt, which became more acute during the off-milling season when the proportion of “poor” workers ballooned up to forty-five (45) per cent of the total labor population. The cyclical nature of poverty in this setting was exacerbated and explained by the fact that the majority of sugar workers (46 per cent) had received only primary education, while only thirty-two (32) per cent graduated from elementary school. Most of their children, like their parents before them, reached only elementary, with half of them already out of school by the time of the survey due to financial constraints. Sugar workers themselves perceived their problems to include the inadequate and sub-minimum wages, lack of education, underemployment, lack of medical services, inadequate housing facilities, and large family size, as among the most urgent issues confronting them. Yet, not surprisingly, they managed to maintain a generally harmonious and paternalistic relationship with their employers. The relative weakness of labor unions in the sample areas of Negros and Iloilo was noted, as the majority of workers remained unorganized. In general, the survey concluded that “[c]hange in the sugar plantations indeed may take quite some time,” and that “[m]ost of the sugar workers claim that their present situation was the same five years ago.”<sup>805</sup>

In Ormoc, the first study about the socio-economic conditions of sugarcane workers involving 252 laborers from seventeen sugarcane districts was undertaken in 1969. Based on this research, a typical worker in

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these were small farms, 19 medium-sized farms; and 8 large farms. In total, there were 62 plantations in Negros Occidental, 21 plantation in Negros Oriental, and 19 plantations in Iloilo included in the survey. Ministry of Labor and Employment, *The Sugar Workers, Two Studies* (Manila: Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies, Undated), 6-7.

<sup>805</sup>Ibid., 10-14.

a sugarcane estate was profiled as a married man above eighteen years of age, with an average of four children, with limited primary education, and earning an average weekly wage between six pesos and fifteen pesos. The jobs of sugar workers then included cutting and harvesting cane, weeding, planting, preparing the land and applying fertilizer in an average of nine hours of work per day.<sup>806</sup> A *capataz* or foreman, on the other hand, earned between 16.50 pesos and 25.50 pesos per week.<sup>807</sup> It should be noted here that in 1965, Republic Act 4180 (Amending R.A. No. 602 otherwise known as the Minimum Wage Law) mandated every employer in the sugar industry covered by Minimum Wage Order No. 1 to pay agricultural workers four pesos minimum wage *per day*. However, laborers in Ormoc sugar estates were actually only paid 2.50 pesos per ton of cane cut. Most estates around the country, including those in Ormoc, also preferred the less costly and more popular *pakyaw* method whereby a group of workers were paid a lump sum for piecemeal work. Indeed, the *pakyaw* system had been hailed as early as the 1920s as a far more efficient method of labor management on sugar haciendas in the Philippines, which had been initially practised with much success in Negros and neighboring provinces.<sup>808</sup> Due to this arrangement, however, wages were drastically reduced and became more uncertain, with the capacity to save for laborer families becoming virtually impossible, except in instances where wives and children also worked for wages to supplement family income.<sup>809</sup> As a daily wage earner, the sugar laborer and his family were not covered by medical or health benefits or insurance, nor did they receive bonuses.<sup>810</sup> It was thus imperative that additional sources of income were identified. But contrary to the popular notion that sugar laborers preferred to work outside the estates, many actually chose to persist working on the haciendas and plantations. The following statement made by a sugar worker in Ormoc in 1969 illustrated the

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<sup>806</sup> F. Anasco, "A study on the socio-economic conditions of sugar farm laborers in Ormoc City," thesis for Master of Arts in Economics (Cebu City: University of San Carlos, April 1970).

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>808</sup> S. Asuncion, *The Growing of Sugar Cane in the Philippines*, Circular No. 167, reprint from the Philippine Agricultural Review Vol 18 No 3 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1925), 20.

<sup>809</sup> Anasco, "A study on the socio-economic conditions of sugar farm laborers in Ormoc City," 63.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

stark reality posed by the chronic lack of employment and economic alternatives for those who did not have viable options for alternative employment. The lack of life choices and suitable employment meant forced perseverance on these estates despite poor wages and the harsh manual nature of the work:

I cannot even wish to work in a factory or with the government because even by wishing I would sound too presumptuous—especially when I have not even gone to school. Who does not like to work in a place where one is not forever under the heat of the sun? Nobody would turn away from a better paying job—I am no exception. I crave for more income so that I can buy more and better things for my family; but, to be left without a choice is a different story. I cannot say that I am contented with what I have now. No, I have my own dreams, so I hope that my children would fare better than I did.<sup>811</sup>

Yet, given this bleak situation, what was the role of the government in the sugar estates? Mediating grassroots relations between the landowner and workers was the role and responsibility of the barangay, which by law was mandated to plan and implement government policies, programs, projects and related activities in the community. It was also theoretically “a forum wherein the collective views of the people may be expressed, crystallized and considered, and where disputes may be amicably settled.”<sup>812</sup> But in reality, government interference in Barangay Nalunopan, like in other sugar estates in the Philippines, had traditionally been limited only to road construction and other infrastructure, maintenance of law and order, and the provision of public primary education and basic health services.

With the hacendero/landowner all-powerful and the government seemingly distant, it was the Catholic Church that filled the void of responding to the workers’ welfare, both spiritually and materially.<sup>813</sup> The

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<sup>811</sup> Cited in Anasco, *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>812</sup> Local Government Code of the Philippines, Book III, Local Government Units, “Title One. The Barangay,” Section 384, Role of the Barangay.

<sup>813</sup> See, for example, A. Jesena, “The Sacadas of Sugarland: A Report,” *Action Now* Vol 1 No. 44 (1969), 4-11. An electronic article is also available online: A. Jesena, “The sacadas of sugarland” (Online).

Archdiocese of Palo, which exercised jurisdiction over Ormoc, took an active interest in the city and its labouring classes early on, as a direct response to the liberal theological movement sweeping through most of the Catholic world in the 1970s. In 1975, Reverend Olalio Loperando<sup>814</sup> was assigned to Ormoc specifically to mobilize the labor union of sugar workers, although Nalunopan was not included in his mission sites. An extract of Reverend Loperando's interview provides a glimpse of the pastoral perspective of the Catholic Church on behalf of the laboring poor at that time:

**Reverend Olalio Loperando:** When I was assigned to Ormoc in 1975, I was made the president of an existing labor union...called Christian Association of the Philippines, Christian Workers Association, CWA. I was assigned as president by Archbishop [Cipriano] Urgel while at the same time I was staying in the convent [of] Saint Peter and Paul Parish not necessarily as an assistant but for that special mission.

**Author:** Would you know Father why there was a special mission? Why was there a specific special mission for Ormoc?

**Loperando:** The purpose of that labor union organized by the Church, by Archbishop Urgel, was simply to help the sugarcane workers.

**Author:** Why?

**Loperando:** Because that was the real problem there that time.

**Author:** So there was a problem that the Church identified?

**Loperando:** Yes! We had a lawyer with us, he's now one of the judges in Cebu, he was helping us out run the labor union.

**Author:** So this labor union, how many members did it have that time?

**Loperando:** I would not recall because that time we were still recruiting members because there were two kinds, two types of

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<sup>814</sup> Pseudonym.

hacenderos in Ormoc. The rich hacendero and more or less not rich hacenderos. And in the labor union we had a CPA [certified public accountant] with the less rich hacenderos. But with the bigger organizations of the rich hacenderos, we didn't have any.

**Author:** Why?

**Loperando:** They refused.

**Author:** They didn't allow it?

**Loperando:** Yeah, refused, they would not.<sup>815</sup>

The Church was powerless to force its programs among these needy communities in the face of such opposition. But it did not stop it from pursuing secret missions to organize laborers. Nonetheless, despite these missions by the Church, the plight of the sugar workers remained unchanged as shown in another study in 1986 that focused on twenty male and eight female 'landless' sugarcane workers in Ormoc. The majority (71 per cent) had attained only primary education, with fourteen (14) per cent reaching secondary school, and the same percentage without any formal education at all.<sup>816</sup> The majority of these workers (57 per cent) lived in the *baraks* of the landowners, which did not always have sanitary toilets. For those areas without toilets, the riverbanks served the purpose, which posed lingering health and sanitary issues as the main sources for drinking water were open wells, springs, artesian wells or public pumps. Notable was the fact that a sizeable number of respondents (32 per cent) worked as hired laborers over a span of six to twelve years, with the average length of service in the haciendas set at sixteen years. In addition, the majority (57 per cent) were

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<sup>815</sup> Reverend Father Olalio Loperando (pseudonym), interview with author, 30 August 2013, in Santo Niño Parish Church, Tacloban City, original in English. The hacenderos' supreme authority in the hacienda, which subsumes both economic and political power, in this case of Negros Occidental, is discussed in detail in P. Kreuzer, "Domination in Negros Occidental: variants on a ruling oligarchy," PRIF-Report No. 112 (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), 2011) (Online).

<sup>816</sup> E. Barte, "A profile of the landless sugarcane farm workers in Ormoc District" (Bachelor of Science thesis in Agriculture (Agricultural Economics). Baybay, Leyte: Visayas State College of Agriculture, April 1987), 10. However, the areas of the survey had not been identified. By 'landless,' Barte refers to "sugarcane farm workers who do not own the land they are working on and are dependent from (sic) their wages as the main source of their livelihood" (8).

local, or native to the place where they resided and only seven (7) per cent were migrants from other provinces. Both these findings showed that workers were not migratory laborers that tended to follow unfolding economic opportunities during harvest seasons. Many, in fact, were long-term sedentary workers, who had failed to see their socio-economic prospects improve over the years.<sup>817</sup>

In stark contrast to sugar workers, rice farmers, though they shared similar socio-economic conditions, at least owned the lands they tilled. A typical rice farmer in Ormoc in 1970 was also married, with three to four children, had some elementary education, and owned an average of one to two hectares of land.<sup>818</sup>

Not surprisingly, therefore, living conditions for sugar workers and their families in haciendas even under normal circumstances were historically far worse than in non-sugarcane producing communities.<sup>819</sup> Nonetheless, despite the dismal socio-economic conditions on sugar estates in Ormoc in the 1970s and '80s, it was relatively tension-free between the landowning class and the workers. Armed conflict had reached its height in the 1960s between hacendero political families feuding over land and the conflict spilling over into local and regional politics, notably between the Larrazabals and the Tans. But there was relative calm in the next two decades despite the calamitous national collapse of the sugar industry in the country in the early 1980s. In Negros Occidental, the sugar bust sparked a peace and order crisis.<sup>820</sup> The downfall of the industry meant that by 1985

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<sup>817</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>818</sup> C. Ranolas, "The socio-economic profile of rice farmers in Ormoc City: Its implications to countryside development" (Master of Science thesis in Business Administration. Cebu City: University of the Visayas, March 1979), Chapter 3.

<sup>819</sup> See, for example, J. de Boer, *Sweet Hazards, Child labor on sugarcane plantations in the Philippines* (Netherlands: Terre des Hommes Netherlands 2005) (Online); R. Rutten, *Women Workers of Hacienda Milagros, Wage Labor and Household Subsistence on a Philippine Sugarcane Plantation* 30. (Publicatieseri Zuid- en Zuidoost-Azie, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1982); A. Jesena, "The Sacadas of Sugarland: A Report;" and, I.T. Runes, *General Standards of Living and Wages of Workers in the Philippine Sugar Industry*.

<sup>820</sup> See, for example, M. Billig, *Barons, Brokers and Buyers, The Institutions and Cultures of Philippine Sugar* (Ateneo de Manila University Press and University of Hawaii Press, 2003); V. Gonzaga, *Crisis in Sugarlandia: The Planters' Differential Perceptions and Responses and their Impact on Sugarcane Workers' Households*, final report to Visayas Research Consortium and Philippine Social Science Council (Bacolod City: La Salle Social Research Center, 1986).



about 250,000 workers in Negros alone were either under- or unemployed, triggering a rise in insurgency particularly in Negros Occidental where hunger became a real problem for many families.<sup>821</sup> In a 1989-1990 study on workers at the Victorias-Manapla Sugar Company in Negros Occidental, for example, it concluded that support for the communist-inspired New People's Army (NPA) insurgency came from the ranks of "untenured workers" and was based on the desire for the "restoration of the patron-client ties" in the absence of a welfare system that could respond to basic social needs, especially in times of dire economic stress.<sup>822</sup>

Ormoc had its share of insurgent activities among politicised factions of the laboring classes, but it had not been as pronounced as in Negros. One notable incident that had not been reported in the media was when Don Potenciano Larrazabal, Sr. was kidnapped in 1986 and brought to the mountains of Ormoc. It was originally blamed on the insurgent New People's Army (NPA), but later turned out to have been the work of disgruntled military personnel.<sup>823</sup> Sporadic NPA sightings and armed encounters with the military in Ormoc have continued to occur until today, with several upland barangays being persistently labelled as high-risk areas for insurgency.<sup>824</sup>

### **Flood and the disaster in 1991**

Set against this backdrop of dire poverty in Ormoc in general and of Barangay Nalunopan in particular, the flash flood occurred on 5 November 1991. As the waters of the Anilao River rushed downstream towards the city plains, the first damming of logs and debris occurred in Nalunopan, following

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<sup>821</sup> M.A. Satake, *Sugar Industry Workers and Insurgency: The Case of Victorias-Manapla*, ed. Violeta Lopez-Gonzaga (Bacolod City: Southeast Asia Centre for Resource Studies, Consultancy and Training (SEACREST), 2001), 3.

<sup>822</sup> Lopez-Gonzaga, *Crisis in Sugarlandia*, 133.

<sup>823</sup> Police Officer (Ret) Pocson (pseudonym), interview with author, 10 October 2013, in downtown Ormoc City. He actually backtracked on this story, saying this was an incident not known by many even in Ormoc, and stated firmly he did not want to be quoted. According to PO Puzon, in response to this incident, however, President Cory Aquino relieved the entire military force stationed at Camp Downes and replaced them with a new contingent. However, no reference in the news had been found on this and as such could not be corroborated.

<sup>824</sup> These barangays were Quezon Jr., Mahayahay, Mabini, Mahayag, and Cabingtang. Municipal Agrarian Reform Officers (MARO), anonymous interview with author, 9 October 2013, in Ormoc City. Also, L. Jimenea, "NPA courier nabbed in Ormoc City," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 May 1998, 13; "Five killed in NPA ambush in Ormoc," *Philippine Star*, 27 March 2004), 1&2.

the natural river bends. When the Malinawon creek suddenly overflowed, the flimsy houses of Purok Uno were all swept away. The flood was *kalit nga kakusog*, so unexpected yet so strong, says Berto, a *horna* residing in Purok Uno in 1991,

**Berto:** It did not take very long. About half an hour from its height, it was over! The water subsided...but there were so many houses that were swept away.

**Author:** Here...all houses were swept away? No house was spared?

**Berto:** None was left ma'am, this here near the river. So long as it was near the river none was left.<sup>825</sup>

In fact, fourteen houses were swept away and in a matter of minutes fourteen families were lost. The bodies of eighteen individuals were never recovered. Crispin narrates his memories of Benito's family who were all killed that day:

**Crispin:** ...they were all swept away, all of them...Eight, they were eight, as they were aunt and nephew (*magtiyaun*) and six children. They were eight. All drowned. They were complacent because for every typhoon they never evacuated. *Sus* when the river rose it met on that part.

**Tasing** (Crispin's daughter): The water went there (pointing in the distance).

**Crispin:** ...We were just complacent because the rain was not strong. There was no strong wind. It was the tornado.<sup>826</sup>

When the sky thundered, many mistakenly believed the rain was over, a prevalent superstition lending to the complacency, as Ronald Boy notes:

**Ronald Boy:** Now, at about eleven o'clock...there was thunder.

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<sup>825</sup> Berto (pseudonym), interview with author, 14 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>826</sup> Crispin (pseudonym), interview with author, 21 April 2013, in his own home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

**Perlita:** It thundered, yes.

**Ronald Boy:** There was thunder here. Now, my grandmother said, thank goodness, there was thunder, the rain has stopped. Yes, that was it. Unexpectedly, the water grew...It was so strong, so strong...This is our roof, our house, it was swept away...I had pulled my grandmother out, we were on the roof, later [the water] became so strong. Then when the house was swept away, I was brought here. My grandmother was immediately swept away with the house.

**Author:** So you saw your grandmother being swept away?

**Ronald Boy:** I saw. Later I was there by the bamboo [trees], but the water was still so strong...I was told to go there. I did not have any clothes on! I had no clothes.<sup>827</sup>

Amazingly, the 'barrio' where public buildings were located as well as the sugarcane fields atop the plateau were not harmed. It was in the fields that those who were lucky enough to escape sought shelter. One *manunubo*, remembering that day, says:

We anticipated ma'am going to the *bukid* (upland, mountain) where the water did not reach because here, everywhere was just water, that portion at the first river was cut at the ridge. The water reached there until here. There were just so many houses swept away.<sup>828</sup>

Most houses in Purok Uno were *hurot tanan*, completely destroyed. Laborer families were not able to save anything and were left with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Women-headed households, in particular, that were already under extraordinary economic stress even prior to the disaster, were made especially vulnerable, as one Purok Uno resident attests, who was living in the *baraks* in 1991 and worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant in the city owned by the Larrazabals:

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<sup>827</sup> Ronald Boy (pseudonym), interview with author, 26 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>828</sup> Berto, interview with author, Ibid.

**Edna:** Our house went like this, swept away! [pantomiming the swirling waters with her hands] So a neighbor was able to grab me, as I still wanted to get our rice, that was what I wanted to do because it was only me who supported my children. So our rice was there, our clothes...

**Author:** So you went back?

**Edna:** I wanted to go back [chuckling]. It was good my neighbor took hold of me. Why, she asked, will you climb back in when the house very nearly got swept away? The water was so strong! *Sus*, later when the roots of this bamboo tree I saw tumbling over and over passed by our house, a portion creaked! Half went that way the other half went this way! It was cut in half...[When we later went to stay with neighbors] my child said, mama let us go back home! Where would we go when we did not have a house anymore?

**Author:** So your house was also completely destroyed?

**Edna:** That time there, yes completely.

**Author:** You were not able to save anything? Not one thing?

**Edna:** None at all, none. That was really a miserable time. It was just me supporting my five children.

**Author:** That time you already had five children?

**Edna:** Yes, in 1989 my husband left me when I was eleven months pregnant with my youngest son who died. Eleven months when my husband left so I had to work.

**Author:** Why did your husband leave you?

**Edna:** ...He wanted to work in Negros! So he never came back! He got himself a wife there!...

**Author:** How many years had you been here before the flood?

**Edna:** We got here in '84, July 27 we came. From '91 how many years was that? Seven.

**Author:** But you knew it was signal number one?

**Edna:** Yes...I was not feeling well but I still worked. I was a dishwasher with the Larrazabals at Chito Chow that is still there now...Lorna [a friend] said, Edna go work as *horna* but how could I when Ely, the *capataz* who is still there married to my relative back when he was still single and had offered me a job as *horna*...one was paid weekly. My monthly pay at Chito Chow's was only 516 pesos but I always got paid as I had five children. So I got 500 every twenty-fifth [of the month], which was not enough...so I would not eat any breakfast and lunch and dinner.

**Author:** So you ate only once a day?

**Edna:** Yes, I would only eat at lunchtime, which was still okay. But I became thin. I would eat bread. At Chito's, when I was there I could not work without having coffee which was twenty aw five pesos.

**Author:** Ah so it was not free at Chito's [for employees]?

**Edna:** *Sud-an* (viand) was free, rice was free but if the viand was chicken you got necks! If it was pig that was butchered it was good because they would even fry you some ribs, but if chicken you got necks...so now if there is nothing to eat, I have salt!<sup>829</sup>

Like other Ormocanons in other parts of the city, those who lived in Nalunopan occasionally experienced flooding in the past, but never on the scale that occurred that day. Those solitary laborer families who chose to live outside Purok Uno in higher elevations within the hacienda and thus were spared from the flood, welcomed their destitute fellow laborers and their families who had lost homes, and they stayed with them for several weeks.

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<sup>829</sup>Edna (pseudonym), interview with author, 28 April 2013, in her own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

## Disaster relief and the clamor for social justice

Relief goods arrived in Nalunopan quite late, only after several weeks. The rough roads into the barangay were strewn with logs and mired in muck and debris so there was no way to bring in food, water and relief services more quickly. But relief goods when they finally came were brought in by trucks, and then there was a belated avalanche of canned goods, sardines, noodles, rice, used clothes, *banig* (palm mat), *kaldero* (pot), and various other necessities that helped ease the traumatic effects of the disaster. The Catholic Church led by the Archdiocese of Palo and nuns of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ) were most active in undertaking relief efforts to Nalunopan. While the *agonal*, Sabin Larrazabal, did not provide material assistance to everyone on the estate who had been badly affected at the time, some did receive help in the aftermath of the flood, indicating the uneven nature of the reciprocal ties that bound the *agonal* to his laborers. When asked if the *agonal* gave them anything after the flood in 1991, one laborer replies:

**Ronald Boy:** Sabin [Larrazabal]? No. Sabin did not give anything.

**Author:** None at all?

**Ronald Boy:** Or maybe it was not possible to know where [the relief] came from as it was held by the organization, they were the ones who gave to the [National Federation of Sugar Workers] NFSW<sup>830</sup> because they really gave.<sup>831</sup>

Yet another laborer reminisced:

**Rolando:** We went to the city because it was the *agonal* who...

**Nes:**<sup>832</sup> Ah *agonal* gave to you?

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<sup>830</sup> The National Federation of Sugar Workers was the organized and militant labor union of sugarcane workers in the Philippines. It had now joined the national labor center, *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU).

<sup>831</sup> Ronald Boy, interview with the author, Ibid.

<sup>832</sup> Former Nalunopan resident who relocated elsewhere, but who went with me to Nalunopan to undertake the interviews. She was the daughter of a sugarcane estate driver much loved by the *agonal* for being a very industrious and loyal man.

**Rolando:** ...[he] supported us...

**Author:** He assisted you?

**Rolando:** Yes. It was my *amo*.<sup>833</sup> After [the flood], there was help.<sup>834</sup>

Some sugar workers themselves were recruited to assist other victims, while they themselves were victims, when one politically active individual among them mobilized a volunteer group. A *horna* who had seen his grandmother and their *payag* (hut) taken by the flood, remembers still helping out:

**Ronald Boy:** So we ran to the NFSW...

**Author:** You helped there?

**Ronald Boy:** Yes. We were the one. We transferred there. Instead of us being helped, we helped those who had been washed out here in Nalunopan.

**Author:** Why did you help there? Did someone ask you to help?

**Ronald Boy:** Yes, here, it was Edna [referring to the de facto leader in Nalunopan] who asked help in distributing, so I did.<sup>835</sup>

Operations in the *katubhan*<sup>836</sup> (sugar plantation) began again a month after the flood. During the intervening weeks, laborers rebuilt their houses with valuable material support from the RSCJ nuns, who adopted Nalunopan as their mission area. Sister Iraida Sua-an, who was among the second batch from her Order sent to Ormoc, remembered seeing hungry sugarcane laborers and their families foraging in the mud for root crops to eat, so dire was their situation in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. This unfolding emergency prompted the RSCJ to pursue a sustained program of assistance

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<sup>833</sup> Filipino, Bisaya, lit. employer.

<sup>834</sup> Rolando (pseudonym), interview with author, 22 April 2013, in Ronald Boy's home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>835</sup> Ronald Boy (pseudonym), interview with author, Ibid.

<sup>836</sup> Bisaya, lit. sugarcane plantation. Ronald Boy replied when asked if he immediately went back to work in November 1991: "It took time. We did not go back to work for a month after the flood. We fixed our houses first."

to Nalunopan flood victims.<sup>837</sup> Like other devastated areas in Ormoc at that time, a food-for-work program was launched to encourage active self-help among them. Women hauled gravel and other building materials, while men worked on rebuilding their houses. As wages, thirty-six households received rice, *tinapa* (smoked fish), and noodles for six months.

In the beginning, Sabin Larrazabal allowed the nuns to build houses with asbestos roofing and bamboo slat walls, far better houses than the families had ever had before. The nuns also began to organize the community through Catholic values formation programs. In the course of their work in Nalunopan, it was inevitable that issues pertaining to wages were raised. However, the plantation management swiftly suppressed them. Edna, who was identified as the leader of the group demanding higher wages, was driven out in 1998, as she recounts below:

...We went to Sister [Iraida Sua-an] first because they gave [Christmas gifts] early that time...Sister gave 300 [pesos] but said before giving, this Sunday, Edna—there was a mass there and I was a choir member...this Sunday Edna tell those who want to pay for land by instalment, it should be clear that it is payment by instalment [and] not given, as these people only watched out for giveaways. It should be made clear, that those who want to pay for land by instalment can do so, if we can buy [land] should there be enough signatures and if we can find some help in buying then we will buy. So when the mass ended there was a meeting...Now it was because I had been so active that I very nearly got killed because I started going house to house to tell people that Saturday...so I told them whoever wanted to pay for land by instalment but I made it clear it is payment by instalment but that it will take time, about several years, and it will not be given for free but it will be cheap.

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<sup>837</sup> Sr. Iraida Sua-an, informal conversations with author, February to October 2013, in Ormoc City. She said that one day while walking in a devastated area in the sugar estate after the 1991 tragedy, a voice she attributed to God came to her suddenly telling her this community was her vocation. An Ilonggo native, she devoted the next twenty years of her life to building the community discussed in Chapter 8.



Who would not like to have a 100-square meter [lot] that is cheap? So they signed. *Sus* I was not even done with the signatures, this Dencio went to the office of the Larrazabal's, the report...was that I was asking people to sign for higher wages. They called me in that afternoon...We met that Boy Hapon, his name was Boy Hapon, the assistant of this Caloy Larrazabal. He said, Mi [referring to her husband] it is good we saw each other, come ride with us because *agonal*, no it is Caloy calling for you at his office. I said, could I go with you, Mi? Boy said you want to tag along? What are you, bringing a pig? Indeed. It was really lucky, you know why? It was me they wanted...it was lucky they took my husband. When my husband came home, I said—he was very quick...I said what did they want? He said let us talk about it at home. Finish your shopping quickly.

When we went to the market, [we were so quick] we were like thieves...So when we got back home...I put down my purchases, he said, what gives you such nerve,<sup>838</sup> Day? I said is that so?...Why did I have the nerve?...It was that Caloy, our *agawon*, told him, why are you here when it is not you I wanted? It is your wife Edna I want. Why is she asking people to sign for higher wages? Now...where is Edna, he was asked. At the market, Loy, shopping. He suddenly went out to the back of their building! So he said I will not go to Isabel just yet and I must go to the office, as I had wanted to go to Isabel that Tuesday morning. I had to go to the office.

That was the beginning *sus*! But it was very lucky of me because [my husband] was very close to Caloy...My husband, the old one,<sup>839</sup> when he was still small his parents already served the Larrazabals....For example, if he did not want to drive for them? They could not do anything because they came from way back. So that was why that evening he asked me what gave me the nerve. I told him why not, when working with the...non-government [organization] mandated

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<sup>838</sup> The term used was *kaisog*, which in Bisaya can mean bravery, courage, guts or nerve. In this instance, it was meant as an irony, so the appropriate translation would be 'nerve.'

<sup>839</sup> Edna constantly refers to her third husband as *tiguwang*, old, to differentiate him with her two other husbands.

it...I organized, I gave lectures...So that was when he said work was so difficult now. I had to go to Caloy on Tuesday morning. You work for a living with the Larrazabals, we are poor, it only takes one flick of the hand [and] you can just be [killed].<sup>840</sup>

There were no killings in Nalunopan, fortunately, but at least three families were expelled from the hacienda for fomenting dissatisfaction among the laborers about their wages.<sup>841</sup>

### **Inherent vulnerability and poverty as norms**

Twenty-two years after the flash flood of 1991, by 2013, life for victim-survivors in the hacienda had stabilized. There were still no footbridges inside the estate, so one had to cross the Malinawon Creek twice, balancing unsteadily on rocks. The creek in this area is muddy from years of use by Purok Uno residents who typically still did not have sanitary toilets. Purok Uno itself is a small settlement of ten houses located on a plateau next to the Malinawon Creek. The other laborer houses were scattered throughout the barangay. In the middle of this narrow plateau is an open space used by teenage boys for volleyball and arrayed around it were houses made of *nipa*, bamboo, and occasionally hollow blocks. Commonly, the houses' floors were dirt, and children of all ages would run in and out barefoot. There were two *sari-sari*<sup>842</sup> stores, which were also the source of the community's music, ear-splittingly blared from loud speakers. The stores had *pawod* lean-tos where groups of men and women sometimes whiled away time drinking *tuba* (fermented palm sap) and/or playing bingo. Gambling was a prevalent pastime, as was drinking *tuba*, popular among both men and women. *Tuba* was not cheap. It was about 100 pesos per gallon,<sup>843</sup> but according to many,

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<sup>840</sup> Edna (pseudonym), interview with author, 28 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>841</sup> Caloy Larrazabal, a son of the patriarch Sabin Larrazabal, who had a reputation for being harsh with his workers, was killed in 1996, shot at close range in one of the estates that the family owned. Allegations were that the NPA did it, but rumours abounded it was a personal business deal gone wrong. The case remains open until today.

<sup>842</sup> Filipino, lit. a small merchandise store often operating on loan from its customers and selling a variety of snacks and other foodstuff.

<sup>843</sup> This price was valid in 2013. But after the devastation of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in November 2013, where numerous coconut trees were uprooted, the price skyrocketed to 200 pesos per gallon.

its consumption lightened the hardship of the day and was considered a good way to unwind with friends.

There was a popular illegal gambling game called *Swetres*, which operated similarly to the illegal numbers game called *jueteng*.<sup>844</sup> There were some households with television sets, but not everyone had electricity. At night, it was more common to use rudimentary *gaseras*, or gas lamps. Wandering about were gaggles of ducks, geese and chickens left to roam free. An occasional piglet would be tied under a tree, but raising hogs was forbidden for sanitary reasons. A few yards away was a communal *poso* (artesian well), where residents took baths in plain view of anyone passing by, did laundry, and gathered water for drinking and cooking. Nearby was the *baraks* where four families lived, a long rectangular structure hugging the side of a cliff, with cemented piles and pillars, a corrugated iron roof and bamboo slats for walls. The *baraks* is only meant for seasonal workers, who theoretically left after harvest time. But in reality most of the families stay indefinitely, as the plantation offered more or less permanent work. While the *baraks* was housing owned by the hacienda, the majority of workers lived in houses they had built themselves. Like the urban poor resettlement areas in Barangay Tambulilid, living on the estate is rent-free. But unlike Tambulilid, most Nalunopan residents had access to free and abundant flowing water and, for workers, one could choose where to build a house.

The workers' community gathered in Purok Uno was small and close-knit, one that knew everyone's business. It was an open secret, for example, that Berto, a thirty-nine year old *manunubo*<sup>845</sup> who was burnt brown by the sun, had contracted hepatitis B years after the flood, most probably from sex workers. Or that one of Berto's sisters had foolishly dropped her American boyfriend who had provided her with an apartment in the city only to elope with her penniless Filipino lover. Everyone knew that some women in the past worked here as *burikat* (sex worker), charging low fees affordable to the daily wage earner. Everyone also was aware which families were customarily

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<sup>844</sup> *Jueteng* is an illegal numbers game in the provinces, where a *kubrador* ("banker") collects bets from bettors who choose two numbers from 1 to 37.

<sup>845</sup> Filipino and Bisaya, generic lit. sugarcane worker.

so poor they did not often have anything to eat with their rice except salt. Typical of these small communities, drunken brawls, too, were common, which were blamed on “outsiders.” According to the barangay captain,

**Barangay Captain Fruto Velardo:** In Purok Uno, they are not really from here. But the others had already registered here.

**Author:** As voters?

**Velardo:** Yes. They are from [Barangays] Villaba, Matag-ob...most of them are illiterate. When they get drunk, they go amok.<sup>846</sup>

It was this stigma of ill repute that not only delineated laborer families as outsiders in the barangay, but also discouraged some *hornals* from building their houses in the vicinity. Some of them instead opted to live further inland, where it was not *samok* or *gubot* (disorderly or unruly).<sup>847</sup> But the decision to live away from Purok Uno meant partial isolation from the only community that shared laborers’ values, social situation, and aspirations. Workers were mostly free to live on the estate wherever they liked, which was not physically demarcated by a fence and gave the impression of vast open space and freedom. There was no manor house for the landowner family and no armed patrols to keep laborers confined on the estate and outsiders out of it. One could move about freely, and outsiders did visit friends and relatives often, without fear of being accosted. There was just the land, hundreds of hectares of it, fertile and verdant, planted with a variety of fruit trees and where rows of sugarcane had been cultivated on the topmost plateau for decades. In fact, it was common practice for former residents to go back to Nalunopan occasionally to harvest bananas and other fruits from trees they had planted years ago with their own hands. These, they reasoned, were their trees, and not owned by the plantation estate.

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<sup>846</sup> Barangay Captain Fruto Velardo (pseudonym), interview with author, 28 May 2013, in his own home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>847</sup> Bisaya, lit. both *samok* and *gubot* mean disorderly, unruly. Roman, Bebeng and Tenang (pseudonyms), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 May 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, on why they decided to live at the other side of the *hacienda* where there was no electricity and not in Purok Uno, transcribed and translated by author: Tenang: “There’s no unruliness here.” Bebeng: There it is disorderly, topsy-turvy.”

The daily wage in the plantation estate in 2013 for a *hormal* was seventy pesos per day for six days of work a week. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) had mandated, as of 16 October 2012, that the minimum daily wage in Region VIII, where Ormoc was politically part, was 235 pesos to 241 pesos for plantations and 220.50 pesos for non-plantations.<sup>848</sup> But despite the legislation, the regulation of agricultural estates like sugarcane haciendas had not been strongly enforced by the government. In Ormoc, current daily wages in haciendas remained below the minimum rate authorized by the government, with wages in Nalunopan the most dismal compared with other haciendas that paid between eighty to 120 pesos per day.

In 1991, the daily wage of *hornals* in Nalunopan was fifteen pesos, which was, even then, not enough for food, as some narrate:

**Bebeng:** Commodities were expensive...

**Author:** Yes before the flood (in 1991) how many times in a day did you eat?

**Bebeng:** Oh we ate twice (a day).

**Author:** So it is better now, your life is better now because you are able to eat three times a day?

**Tenang:** Twice, with breakfast at eleven o'clock.

**Author:** Yes that is right, then the next meal is at four o'clock?

**Tenang:** Four o'clock, six o'clock for dinner! Only two meals!

**Author:** What if you became hungry?

**Tenang:** We eat guava leaves!

**Bebeng:** We do not get hungry anymore because it will only get worse.

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<sup>848</sup> Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), "Summary of current regional daily minimum wage rates, Agriculture, Non-Agriculture (in pesos)," as of April 2014, National Wages and Productivity Commission (Online).

**Tenang:** We could not change anything. We would be very hungry as it is.

**Author:** And you, Mang Roman? Before the flood, how many times did you have meals?

**Roman:** Only twice...

**Tenang:** Around seven o'clock because there is nothing to eat, only water. Hunger only comes early the next morning!

**Nita:** Coffee.

**Tenang:** Yes we have coffee.<sup>849</sup>

Another *hornal* argues:

**Berto:** ...Before when the flood did not yet occur, [wages were] enough though we were miserably poor, the wages were paltry, they were so small! Wage in '91, wage in the hacienda, was fifteen pesos.

**Perlita:** Per day.

**Berto:** Per day in the hacienda, now wage is seventy pesos but you cannot say that it is better because it is below the per kilo of our commodities as wage is seventy pesos. When per week, one kilo of rice is thirty-two pesos! It is the same as before! [The prices of] commodities continue to increase!<sup>850</sup>

Yet *hornal* work was a sure way of earning a steady income of seventy pesos a day. A sugar plantation estate thus absorbed labor at a steady rate over the years from among the poorest families without other options for employment. Work on the hacienda was open to children and adults, men and women alike, who were all paid seventy pesos without exception. In fact, child labor was prevalent in Nalunopan, as in other

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<sup>849</sup> Roman, Bebung and Tenang (pseudonyms), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 May 2013, in front of a *sari-sari* store, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, translated by Ate Nita and Nang Perlita during the interview, when asked how many times in a day they ate before the 1991 flood.

<sup>850</sup> Berto (pseudonym), interview with author, Ibid.

sugarcane districts in Ormoc, because children, “do not want to study anymore! They already want to work.”<sup>851</sup> The additional income that children earn helped supplement their family needs, and in many cases, documented to be strongly influenced by the children’s desire to use their earnings to save for educational purposes.<sup>852</sup> The *pakyaw* system, on the other hand, provided slightly higher wages for laborers, and as such was the preferred manner of work by laborers themselves.<sup>853</sup> During harvest season, money was abundant and thus, was a time of real celebration for the laborer community with drinking binges and engagement in gambling activities. Indeed, the prevalence of vices among estate laborers was a recognized drain on family finances, as this statement from a former *hormal* shows:

Four hundred ninety for one week! You want to bet, what about if there were children and accompanied by drink, [the costs are] just too much. What are you going to eat in a week? Four hundred ninety, my God!<sup>854</sup>

The lack of savings and avenues for credit resulted in a persistent critical level of vulnerability for laborers in Barangay Nalunopan. Their

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<sup>851</sup> Nita (pseudonym), informal conversation with author, 19 May 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino. Also see de Boer, *Sweet Hazards, Child labor on sugarcane plantations in the Philippines*.

<sup>852</sup> De Boer, *Ibid*.

<sup>853</sup> Lorna, Myrna, Nita and Perlita (pseudonyms), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 May 2013, in Lorna’s home, Barangay Nslunopan, Ormoc City, original in mixed Bisaya and Filipino, on the different piecework jobs paid for in the sugarcane estate: [Author: When you harvest *tubo* (sugarcane) the wages are higher?] Myrna: It depends. Lorna: It depends. More than a thousand. Nita: For the others, it will reach thousands. Lorna: More. Ate Nita: Yes, that’s big.[Author: Because it’s *pakyaw*?] Lorna: Yes *pakyaw*. [Author: So how much?] Myrna: Per truck. Lorna: Per tonnage similar to *pakyaw* before because if now you cannot load you do not have anything! [Author: How much is that?] Myrna: If you are industrious it’s- Nita: It depends on the truck. If there are many that can be loaded in the sugarcane truck, your pay is big! Myrna: The lowest for *tubo* [Nita: I would know that because that was my father’s work] maybe the lowest for *tubo* is 500. [Author: 500 per day?] Nita: Their wage in a week. That’s the lowest...Perlita: For ten of them. [Author: The 500 is per person?] Ate Nita: That’s net [*malinis na yun*]...[Author: That is only for the harvest, right? What about if not harvest, you go back to *guna*? (referring to clearing land)] Lorna: Ohm! Nita: Yes! That is the 70 pesos. Myrna: 70 per day and the others *pakyawan* [Lorna: It is even (*tabla*)] one camp. *Tabla* (it is even), there is twenty, there is ten. It is not the same. Myrna: One camp they *pakyaw* it. [Author: Who decides what will be done through *pakyaw* or per day?] Woman neighbor: The inspector.

<sup>854</sup> Myrna (pseudonym), interview with author, 19 May 2013, in her mother Lorna’s home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author. She had moved to Manila to marry and work, but was in Barangay Nalunopan at the time of the interview to visit her mother.

families were not prepared, economically speaking, for major disasters, a situation aggravated by the lack of medical and health benefits, as well as the lack of credit. A *horna* responded, for example, when asked what they could do and where they could procure funds during emergency situations:

**Berto:** If someone gets sick, no one will extend credit to us but if we get a large sum of money from our wages it is just enough for our food.

**Author:** So what happens then?

**Berto:** That is it ma'am. Usually if someone gets sick we use only herbal [medicines], what we traditionally used.

**Delia** (his wife): Medicol.<sup>855</sup>

**Berto:** Because even if we run to the hospital we would not be accepted as we do not have any money.<sup>856</sup>

It was somewhat better for drivers on the estate because they at least could go to the *agalon* for an advance, which the management "deducted [from their wages] every week, for every 1000 [pesos] they deduct 200 [pesos] every week."<sup>857</sup>

In this socio-economic system where chronic vulnerability was the norm, the power of the hacendero in Nalunopan continued to be absolute. The barangay *sanggunian*,<sup>858</sup> for example, cannot be elected without the blessing of the landowner. In fact, in the last midterm general elections in May 2013, the Larrazabal family, who explicitly supported a group of political aspirants, dictated the votes of Barangay Nalunopan residents. The government's legitimacy signified through the role of the barangay *sanggunian*, despite its clear legal mandate to side with the people was

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<sup>855</sup> A local brand of paracetamol.

<sup>856</sup> Berto and Delia, interview with author, 14 April 2013, in their own home, original in Bisaya, translated to Filipino by Sr. Iraida Sua-an during the interview, transcribed and translated to English by author.

<sup>857</sup> Ronald Boy (pseudonym), interview with author, 21 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>858</sup> Barangay advisory council, which is the lowest elected government in the Philippines. It is composed of the *punong barangay* or the chief executive of the barangay government as presiding officer and seven regular *sangguniang* barangay members and a youth representative, who is called the *sangguniang* barangay chair, as members.



always greatly diminished and subordinated to the interests of the landowner. The Larrazabals had historically controlled the land, labor and lives of many ordinary individuals who depended on them for their livelihoods and subsistence.

The government, through the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), had attempted to break the power of such landowners through the implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), an ambitious redistribution program of public and private agricultural lands to landless farmers and farmworkers, “irrespective of tenurial arrangement.”<sup>859</sup> Nonetheless, most of the disputes between farmers and landowners in Ormoc had been fought in court, with the former often on the losing side for lack of legal title for possession of land.<sup>860</sup> Isolated cases of forcible occupation of estates by tenant farmers in Ormoc had also occurred,<sup>861</sup> while agrarian reform had been pursued to a certain degree.<sup>862</sup> From 1991 after the flood disaster to 2013, for example, 171 agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) in Ormoc had been awarded emancipation patents or titles to rice and corn land<sup>863</sup> covering 307.5 square meters, while 4,566 ARBs had been awarded certificates of land ownership (CLOAs) covering 8,217 square

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<sup>859</sup> Department of Agrarian Reform, “What is CARP (Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program), or RA 6657?” (Online)

<sup>860</sup> For example in 1996, in Barangay Milagro, an upland barangay in Ormoc City, some sixty families petitioned the City Environment and Natural Resources office (CENRO) to determine why an alleged public land they had been tilling was being claimed by Melchor Larrazabal. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) upheld Larrazabal’s claim as legal, even though the disputed land was part of the 4,000-hectare Anilao watershed. E. Justimbaste, “Farmers, landowners fight over hilly Ormoc farms,” *Philippine News and Features* Vol 12 No 32, 27 January 1996, 14.

<sup>861</sup> See, for example, L. Jimenea, “41 beneficiaries of CARP forcibly occupy Ormoc farm,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 26 December 1999, 10; L. Jimenea, “War of beneficiaries: Tension grips Ormoc land put under CARP,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 26 February 2000, 12.

<sup>862</sup> See, for example, L. Jimenea, “41 beneficiaries of CARP forcibly occupy Ormoc farm.” In other parts of the Philippines, the issue of agrarian reform has been extensively covered in past studies. See J. Putzel, *Captive Land: The Politics of Agrarian Reform in the Philippines* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, co-published by Catholic Institute for International Relations (London) and Monthly Review Press (New York), 1992).

<sup>863</sup> An emancipation title is issued following the provisions of Presidential Decree No. 27 dated 21 October 1972, “Decreeing the emancipation of tenants from the bondage of the soil, transferring to them the ownership of the land they till and providing the instruments and mechanism therefor.” The awarding of the emancipation patent to a tenant farmer was for a “portion constituting a family-size farm of five hectares if not irrigated and three hectares if irrigated.” The landowner, on the other hand, “may retain an area of not more than seven hectares if such landowner is cultivating such area or will now cultivate it.”

meters.<sup>864</sup> In Nalunopan, twenty-two ARBs have been awarded CLOAs from 1991 to 2013 covering thirty-nine hectares.<sup>865</sup> None of these land awards, however, were sugarlands. Certainly, like other sugarcane landowners in other parts of the country who had “employed every means available to them to prevent the implementation of agrarian reform,”<sup>866</sup> large sugar landowners in Ormoc like the Larrazabals, Seraficas, and Tans had resisted attempts at dividing large tracts of their sugarlands, arguing in 1996 that,

(1)...it is not economically feasible and sound to divide sugarlands into small farmlots for distribution to supposed beneficiaries; (2) that DAR must respect the status quo existing between the farmworkers and the landowners-planters and the contract of agreement which they have executed which proved to be effective in establishing and maintaining a peaceful and harmonious existence between them; and (3) that DAR create the support service offices and facilities for the benefit of the supposed beneficiaries and the landowners-planters.<sup>867</sup>

The land of barangay Nalunopan, which had been predominantly used for sugarcane cultivation but which had never been placed under agrarian

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<sup>864</sup> Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR)-Region VIII, “Summary of Land Acquisition and Distribution (LAD) Accomplishment in Ormoc City, after November 15, 1991,” as of 2013.

<sup>865</sup> Ibid.

<sup>866</sup> “CARP no threat to sugar industry, says DAR,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 18 February 2000, 16. In two case studies undertaken on land reform and changes in land ownership concentration in Nueva Ecija Province on two villages with two different rice farming environments, the conclusion is reflective of the difficulties to enforce reform: “Land reform has provided to tenants and succeeded in breaking up huge estates but the program has failed to effectively address land ownership concentration. The original landowners with their relatives still own a significant portion of the agricultural area in these villagegs. This occurred not because of transfer actions of beneficiaries in the land market but because of a *flawed land redistribution program*. In particular, the evasion tactics of landlords have been ignored and in several cases have been recorded as accomplishment of the program. *The various schemes of landlords to evade land reform have prevented real land redistribution to take place in the country*” (emphasis supplied), in M. Ballesteros and A. dela Cruz, “Land reform and changes in land ownership concentration: Evidence from rice-growing villages in the Philippines,” Discussion Paper Series No. 2006-21 (Makati City: Philippine Institute for Development Studies, December 2006), 16 (Online).

<sup>867</sup> Letter from Lorenzo Reyes (OIC-Undersecretary, LAFMA) addressed to Adelberto Banigued (DAR Region VIII Director), on “Position paper on the CARP coverage of sugarlands within the Ormoc Sugar Mill District,” DAR Opinion No. 127-96, dated 13 December 1996 (Online).

reform, was recently scheduled for conversion to industrial/residential lots, making it legally ineligible for DAR land acquisition and reform.<sup>868</sup>

### **Changes since 1991**

The flood disaster in 1991 did not radically change the socio-economic conditions of sugar workers in Nalunopan. What it did, however, was focus attention on the grim plight of laborer survivors in the barangay, to which the Catholic Church and the RSCJ responded to by pursuing a recovery program of resettlement. To what extent change occurred in the lives of those who chose to leave the sugar estate and relocate elsewhere is explored in the next chapter. But for those who opted to remain on the estate as laborers, including those who briefly left but returned when lack of employment outside the estate became acute, the disaster did not result in any meaningful change in their socio-economic circumstances. The discussion below reveals the rather hopeless view typical among these sugar workers who were victims of the 1991 flood and continued to endure severe practical problems and deprivation in their daily lives:

**Berto:** For me Sister [referring to Sister Iraida Sua-an, who was also present during this interview] in my opinion we tilled the field like before.

**Author:** Nothing changed?

**Delia** (his wife): None.

**Author:** Why is that?

**Berto:** What is it that would change here ma'am when the quality of life here is not good for us?...For me what is good now is to have our own land because...it is not the same as before when we were still small we were limited to work. Better to work than go to school so we could help our parents...I have not seen anyone improve, I have not

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<sup>868</sup> Informal conversation with municipal agrarian reform officers (MAROs), 9 October 2013, in Ormoc City.

seen anyone crawl out of poverty. Maybe it depends on oneself, one must endeavor now if one is not yet working hard.<sup>869</sup>

Yet, today, Barangay Nalunopan is increasingly adopting a plantation-type operation, becoming a hybrid-like hacienda, keeping only those elements beneficial to the landowner and his family, while also adopting the more commercial and less personalistic qualities typical of plantations and agribusiness. The issue of credit during emergency situations, for example, which had been historically a responsibility assumed by the *hacendero* as *agonal* to his workers, is the most glaring shift in the manner of operations in haciendas today. According to one *horal*,

[We have to] work to have money...I got sick before but if there is no work there is no one else to help us. I at least have the support of my son. If he gets sick I will work but I do all the work. My situation is very difficult, if I get sick I will not be able to work at all.<sup>870</sup>

Living in the hacienda was also a privilege that could be withdrawn by the *agonal*. If a family did not contribute at least one able-bodied man, woman or child to work in the *katubhan*, a bulldozer was dispatched to raze the house, sending a stern message to the rest of the labor community that, "The land is theirs but if you don't work on the land they will drive you away."<sup>871</sup> The barangay captain of Nalunopan, however, denied this policy of forcibly evicting families who don't work in the *katubhan*:

**Barangay Captain Fruto Velardo:** No that is not true at all.

**Author:** That was what people in Purok Uno said. That is not true?

**Velardo:** No...if you live in their *baraks*, of course. If it was your house and land and they live there but go to another to work, of course anyone will get angry...Why then in our case here in the barangay

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<sup>869</sup> Berto and Delia (pseudonyms, husband and wife), simultaneous interviews with author, 14 April 2013, Ibid.

<sup>870</sup> Roy (pseudonym), interview with author, 21 April 2014, in his own home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and Bisaya, when asked if he had ever experienced being ill and unable to work, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>871</sup> Tasing (pseudonym), interview with author, 21 April 2013, in her father Crispin's own home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

proper this is also the Larrazabals? No one here is forced to work in the hacienda.

**Author:** Perhaps that is the case in the *barrio*.

**Velardo:** In Purok Uno, majority of those in Purok Uno, the houses are the hacienda's and they live there. The land is also the hacienda's. Of course whoever it is, if you need people and those people who live in your house, in your land, go to someone else to work, it is not good.

**Author:** So how are newcomers controlled—for example I am a newcomer and I want to live in Nalunopan, will I be able to enter just like that?

**Velardo:** Yes of course, but we have already dealt with this because you can know how a person acts. In Purok Uno if there is someone who does not act appropriately of course I call him to come to the barangay...or I get a barangay clearance for him to know where he came from and a certification to know if he is all right.

**Author:** Okay. So you are the one who controls this?

**Velardo:** Of course that is my responsibility.

**Author:** It is because I was thinking...how is it controlled that someone cannot just come in and build a house? It is because if a house is already erected it would be difficult to evict him, right?

**Velardo:** Oh yes.

**Author:** So if you were the hacendero how will you control this?

**Velardo:** They ask permission...from the owner and I have them investigated from where they came from, what...their purpose is why

they were erecting a house. And then we ask permission from the owner of the land.<sup>872</sup>

Yet, during the fieldwork period in February to October 2013, Tasing's house was bulldozed one afternoon in July 2013. Her family did not live in the *baraks* but in a house they had built on their own. Neighbors had pitched in to save her meagre possessions, as the family was not present that fateful afternoon, while another neighbor, who worked as a sugarcane driver, operated the bulldozer under instructions from the hacienda management. Tasing came home after doing laundry work in the city to find her school-age children standing shell-shocked in front of the rubble where their house had been just that morning. No one in Tasing's family had worked in the *katubhan* for the past two years, including her husband who had suffered a stroke and could no longer work. They had been warned the previous year to leave, or send someone to work in the estate to ensure continued residence in the vicinity.

Sugarcane was the sole agricultural produce in Nalunopan, but cultivated on such a small scale that it did not entail huge investments in technology. Here, the laborers still manually cleared the land for planting and harvesting, while drivers who were paid on a pakyaw or piecework basis operated rudimentary modes of transport and equipment. The *hornals*, however, were paid a daily wage, which they received every Saturday at the *agonal*'s office in the city. The shift towards a less personalistic relationship between the estate and its workers occur as the old hacienda system is increasingly relinquished to a younger generation of the Larrazabal family, who were not inclined to cultivate the same personal ties with workers as their aging family patriarch, who was *buotan*,<sup>873</sup> had once done. The next generation landowner was considered more and more an absentee *agonal*,<sup>874</sup> and the estate was no longer willing to respond to the immediate social needs of laborers, especially in terms of extending credit. Indeed, the

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<sup>872</sup> Barangay captain Fruto Velardo (pseudonym), interview with author, Ibid., original in Filipino, when asked to comment on the statement that a resident in Barangay Nalunopan had to also work in the *katubhan*, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>873</sup> Bisaya, lit. a good fellow.

<sup>874</sup> Bisaya, lit. boss, master.

provision of loans to laborers had been shown to be notoriously costly as far back as the 1920s, with some landowners reporting annual losses ranging from fifteen to twenty per cent of the money advanced to laborers.<sup>875</sup> Sugarcane laborers simply failed to comply with their agreements and the government provided no means for landowners to obtain redress. Thus, in efforts to ensure continued operations, and coinciding with the gradual relinquishing of daily responsibilities by the original *agalon*, the hacienda in Nalunopan had been transformed into a far more impersonal agricultural corporation. Direct operations were slowly assumed by members of the landowning family assigned to supervise *capatazes* or inspectors, persons among the workers handpicked by management to organize labor, especially during the harvest and planting seasons. This shift in style and governance, however, did not come about because of the flood. It was market-driven, responding to the economic need to rationalize and streamline production costs. In the end, the consequence was to remove the past aura of paternalism that had characterized traditional relationship between the laborer and landowner. What was replaced in its stead was the harsher view of labor strictly as a commodity with limited rights. However, the control of labor mobility continued to be feudal in many respects, in particular in preventing laborers from moving from one hacienda to another in search of better wages and benefits, as one *hormal* explained:

**Berto:** It is the same as before ma'am in transferring for work. When you do not have any other abilities, the regulations are the same.

**Delia** (his wife): It is the same work in the *katubhan* as before, right?

**Berto:** The story here is the same wherever you transfer...

**Author:** So for example at Serafica<sup>876</sup> the regulations are the same?

**Berto:** It is more advantageous at Serafica's because they have SS [referring to the Social Security System] Sister, yes. They are obliged

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<sup>875</sup> *Handbook of the Philippine Sugar Industry* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Philippines: Sugar News Press Company 1929), 15

<sup>876</sup> A hacendero in Ormoc City. See Chapter 3.

to medicate workers because they have workers' health benefits, here there is no SS [social security].

**Author:** You do not have SSS, but in Serafica they have?

**Sister Iraida Sua-an:** Oh yes.

**Berto:** The Seraficas, Tans.

**Sister Iraida:** That is why it is only...they are not permanent...

**Author:** *Pakyaw*.

**Sister Iraida:** Yes they are *pakyaw*.

**Author:** But for example you learned that at Serafica's there is SSS, can you transfer there?

**Delia:** Oh if they accept us!

**Berto:** There is no benefit to it ma'am. It is not possible to transfer haciendas so often because we even left but it was in the past and nothing happened...Once you live here and did no work, you will be expelled!

**Author:** Why?

**Berto:** ...Even if the work is tiring and enormous, I will just work.<sup>877</sup>

Landowners typically did not accept transferees from other haciendas in the vicinity, as a mutually beneficial tactic to preserve collective order and discipline, and to discourage just the situation of laborers demanding more and better wages and benefits.

Recently, plans are allegedly underway to establish a large fighting cock farm in Barangay Nalunopan, which will affect a substantial portion of Purok Uno. Residents there will have their houses bulldozed, those they had built using their own money, to make way for grasslands and housing for

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<sup>877</sup> Berto and Delia (pseudonyms), interview with author, *Ibid.*, original in Bisaya, when asked if it was possible to transfer to another *tubuhan* (sugarcane estate). Sister Ayds Sua-an was present during this interview.



fighting cocks.<sup>878</sup> The sugarcane fields will also be eventually converted into a private housing subdivision, as the Larrazabals enter the more profitable business sector of real estate development. However, the sugar workers of Nalunopan and their families will still be able to work for seventy pesos per day, so long as their health allows them to do so. They will still be able to live rent-free in other uninhabited areas of the estate, but they will have to start all over again. They will have to construct yet another batch of makeshift houses and recover from yet another tragedy, this time the increasing problem of economic uncertainty as market forces continue to fluctuate with respect to sugar and the surplus value of their labor must be continually rationalized. In the end, when the hacienda finally decides to shut down, and it will close down to make way for lucrative private housing projects, the laborers and their families will have to move yet again and put up their house on a piece of land that will become ever smaller, until the hacienda will not have any space left for them.

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<sup>878</sup> Informal conversations with Purok Uno residents, 2013.

## A CATHOLIC CHURCH RESPONSE

*Maybe it was God's will that we came here as we would not have been able to find another job if we had stayed there. My children would not have been able to go to school; they would have started working.*

- Teresita (pseudonym), interview with author, 29 May 2013, in her own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, original in mixed Bisaya and Filipino, transcribed and translated by the author

*This is home.*

- Informal conversations with Sr. Iraida Sua-an, RSCJ, in Purok II-B, Barangay Luna 2013, original in Filipino, translated by author.

In the Philippines, Catholic Churches have played a crucial role in the aftermath of disasters. In times of major calamities such as floods, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, Churches have historically provided not only material, but also more importantly spiritual and psychological assistance to affected communities. Yet, despite this rich history, there persists a lack of knowledge about how exactly they have helped communities recover from catastrophic events brought about by natural hazards. It also remains unclear how communities themselves, as well as local and national governments have harnessed such help in the past. Nonetheless, this lack in systematic studies on the role of religions and religious organizations—in particular the Catholic Church—in the aftermath of catastrophic floods, earthquakes and the like is not unique to the Philippines.

Disaster studies in general have tended to disregard the influence of religion, largely due to the inherent secular bias of Western scholarly thought.<sup>879</sup> However, increasing media coverage of the active involvement of

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<sup>879</sup> T. Chen, "Religious NGO approaches to post-disaster housing reconstruction in Sri Lanka," Abstract for PhD diss. Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne (2014); "Introduction," *Hazard Risk Resilience* Vol. 1 No. 2 (Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience, Durham University, Spring 2013), 11-17; "Salvage and salvation: religion, disaster relief and reconstruction in Asia," *Abstracts*, 22-23 November 2012, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore; M. Ensor, "Disaster evangelism:

various religious organizations after disaster events has placed these institutions under closer public scrutiny in recent decades. At the core of scholarly and policy concerns is the question of how religion and religious organizations espousing particular beliefs influence how people cope with disasters, both in the short- and long-term periods. A common view is that religious beliefs do impose specific value systems that determine how affected communities act. For example, in post-tsunami Aceh in 2004, the imposition of stricter Shariah law was due in part to the belief that the tsunami was punishment for Aceh's moral transgressions, particularly its womenfolk.<sup>880</sup> In a study of post-Hurricane Mitch in Honduras in 1998, it was argued that religion not only shaped how people interpreted and coped with disasters, but also how it influenced disaster preparedness, mitigation and recovery.<sup>881</sup> Again in Fiji after Hurricane Nigel in 1997, Christians reported receiving higher levels of spiritual, physical and financial assistance compared with Muslims and Hindus, with more Christians rating this assistance as adequate.<sup>882</sup> Finally, in discourses on vulnerability, mitigation and adaptation, a study involving communities with multi-religious affiliations in Indonesia (i.e., Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, Hindu, and Buddhist) concluded that the more religious these individuals were in a community, the less likely that adaptive measures will be implemented.<sup>883</sup> This inverse relationship between religiosity and disaster adaptation was argued to be due to fatalistic attitudes and beliefs about disasters as propounded by religious teachings.<sup>884</sup>

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Religion as a catalyst for change in post-Mitch Honduras," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* Vol. 21 No. 2 (August 2003), 31-49; and, A. Reale, "Acts of God(s): the role of religion in disaster risk reduction," *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* 48 (October 2010) (Online).

<sup>880</sup> For example, M.T. Milallos, "Muslim veil as politics: political autonomy, women, and *Syariah* Islam in Aceh," in *Contemporary Islam* Vol 1 No. 3. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, December 2007), 289-301.

<sup>881</sup> M. Ensor, "Disaster evangelism: Religion as a catalyst for change in post-Mitch Honduras."

<sup>882</sup> M. Gillard and D. Paton, "Disaster stress following a hurricane: The role of religious differences in the Fijian Islands," *The Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies* 1999-2. ISSN: 1174-4707 (1999) (Online).

<sup>883</sup> C. Call, "Viewing a world of disaster through the eyes of faith: The influence of religious worldviews on community adaptation in the context of disaster-related vulnerability in Indonesia" (Master of Science thesis, Iowa State University Digital Repository, 2012).

<sup>884</sup> Ibid.

The role of religion in disaster thus appears two-fold. First, at a more practical level, it provides impetus among groups and individuals to mobilize efforts primarily to benefit affiliated survivors. As such, disaster mitigation and rehabilitation programs become processes of inclusion into a larger community.<sup>885</sup> Assistance provided by religions and their affiliated organizations often escape the negative media attention that characterizes government relief and rehabilitation. As a result, allegations of corruption, inefficiency and incompetence in programs led by monks, nuns and priests are rare. Efforts also often continue so long as funds and other donations from sources directly tapped by them continue to sustain these programs. Second, religion in the Philippines underpins the cultural basis for coping, which influences what people do and not do in disaster aftermath. Immediately after a catastrophic event, for instance, outward acts of religiosity become more visible acts among survivor communities, regardless of religious affiliation, as a way of understanding and coping with a hazard event. For example, it is notable that the Muslims in Ormoc, similar to Christian survivors, considered the 1991 flood as “a challenge from God if the people will believe in God.”<sup>886</sup> Consequently, the faithful were often exhorted above all else to become more pious. Because disasters were viewed primarily as punishment from God, disaster mitigation mechanisms—in particular programs that aimed to relocate communities to safer sites—were often not emphasized.<sup>887</sup>

These two issues are explored in greater length in this chapter, focusing in particular on a small community established by a Catholic order of nuns from among families who survived the 1991 Ormoc floods in the sugar hacienda barangay discussed in the previous chapter. These were families who had been largely left out of government recovery programs. To what extent in this case had religion helped build long-term resilience among them, taking into consideration their persistent vulnerability to disaster events?

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<sup>885</sup> Ensor calls the process of offering material benefits to disaster victims as “disaster evangelism.” *Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>886</sup> Imam Mackay Amatunding, conversation with author, 28 May 2013, in the Mosque, Barangay Nasunugan, Ormoc City, in mixed Filipino and Bisaya, translated by author.

<sup>887</sup> Also see A. Reale, “Acts of God(s): the role of religion in disaster risk reduction.”

Resilience is the capacity to recover and cope with disaster. It is closely linked with vulnerability, or “the characteristics of the person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (an extreme natural event or process).”<sup>888</sup> Following this definition, a resilient community is one that manages to reduce its collective and individual risk to life, livelihoods, properties and other assets from disasters through collaborative efforts that encompass the physical, financial and psychological aspects of disaster preparedness. In this last case study, the process of coping and building resilience remained primarily an externally driven initiative wholly funded and implemented by a Church-affiliated organization, and driven in particular by the spirit and vision of one Catholic nun.

### **“Church” versus “church”**

The term “Catholic *church*” in this chapter follows its common meaning of *ecclesia*, referring to the larger community of believers in the tenets of the Catholic faith. On the other hand, “Catholic *Church*” means both of two things. First, it is the structure or building where believers practice their religious activities. Second, it also refers to the hierarchy of the institution itself, composed of the college of bishops, cardinals and the pope. The official face of the episcopacy in the country is the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), preceded by the Catholic Welfare Organization. Established in 1946, the CBCP is mandated to promote solidarity and unity in the Filipino Catholic community. Yet, the link between the CBCP and the variety of Church-affiliated organizations that have proliferated in Philippine society since its inception is commonly limited only to theological and ideological direction. More importantly, financial, legal and institutional linkages between the CBCP and religious orders and organizations are often minimal, unless directly funded and supported by the Church. Legally identified as non-profit groups, these orders and organizations often act independently of each other.

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<sup>888</sup> B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon and I. Davis (2004), *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People’s Vulnerability and Disasters* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 11.

In the case of Ormoc in 1991, the Catholic Church, led by Monsignor Jaime Villanueva, who was then parish priest of Saints Peter and Paul Church, was perceived as among the first responders after the flood event, although at a far lesser degree than the Cebu and local city governments.<sup>889</sup> Within the Church itself, three groups undertook three programs in relief and rehabilitation separately and independently. These were the Archdiocese of Palo, which exercised jurisdiction over Ormoc; the Order of the Benedictine Sisters (OSB), which managed elementary, secondary and tertiary schools at Saint Peter's College (SPC) in downtown Ormoc; and the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ), an order of nuns based in Cebu City.

Other religious organizations also pursued operations in Ormoc in 1991. The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* conducted a relief program called *Lingap Sa Mamamayan*<sup>890</sup> for almost a month after November 1991, which distributed food, clothing, mats, medicines, medical assistance and blankets to approximately 3,000 beneficiaries, both members and non-members.<sup>891</sup> Islamic groups, on the other hand, were not as visible in relief and rehabilitation, as there were only a handful of Muslim residents and fewer who had been adversely affected by the flash flood.<sup>892</sup>

### **Liberation theology and radicalism in the Philippines**

It is important to situate the Church's involvement in Ormoc in relation to its theological core values, its historical political elitism in the Philippines prior to the liberation theology of the 1960s, and its subsequent political advocacy for the preferential treatment for the poor, particularly in rural agricultural areas where the highest rates of poverty existed. In fact, the social action focus of the Church in the country in general characterized most of its programs even prior to the 1960s. But it was only after the Second

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<sup>889</sup> M.C. Gastardo-Conaco et. al., "Flood relief and rehabilitation in Ormoc: Experiences and insights of field workers and beneficiaries," 336-350.

<sup>890</sup> *Lingap sa Mamamayan* (Filipino) roughly translates to "Compassionate Care for Citizens."

<sup>891</sup> As stated in the handwritten letter from Fernando Villanueva, legal officer and minister of the Iglesia ni Cristo, in Ormoc City, 7 April 2013, in response to questions raised by the author in a letter.

<sup>892</sup> Interview with Imam Amatunding, Ibid.

Vatican Council when such efforts were systematized and emphasized.<sup>893</sup> The center-right Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), established in 1953 with the support of the Catholic Church, and the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA), formed in 1966 as the Church's official social action arm with particular emphasis on rural society development, began as apolitical associations geared towards helping peasant communities through small and localized self-help programs.<sup>894</sup> Church-supported projects included the provision of small credit to rural agricultural unions, cottage industries, medical clinics, farmers' associations, piggeries, and housing projects.<sup>895</sup>

By the late 1960s, however, as Vatican II and liberation theology swept through the Catholic developing world, the CBCP issued a pastoral letter that "stressed the plight of the poor (especially farmers, agricultural workers, and fishermen), the need for land reform, and the educational role of the church in teaching social justice, and at the same time that called on the rich to continue supporting charitable works."<sup>896</sup> However, the local clergy did not unanimously support this call for greater social involvement among marginalized sectors of society.<sup>897</sup> There was fear within the Philippine Church hierarchy that revolutionary social movements like communism were antireligious and inherently god-less.

As the imposition of martial law deepened in the 1970s and resistance against established landed families gained ideological ground in the provinces, the New People's Army (NPA)—the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)—though still feeble in the early 1970s, began to gain numerical strength.<sup>898</sup> The issue of land reform

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<sup>893</sup> See G. Clarke, *The Politics of NGOs in South-east Asia, Participation and Protest in the Philippines* (Routledge, 1998).

<sup>894</sup> See J. Franco, "Elections and democratization in the Philippines," in *Comparative Studies in Democratization*, ed. A. Appleton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 82-84.

<sup>895</sup> Clarke, *The Politics of NGOs in South-east Asia*.

<sup>896</sup> Quoted in J. Franco, "Elections and democratization in the Philippines," 82.

<sup>897</sup> H. Wooster, "Faith at the ramparts: The Philippine Catholic Church and the 1986 revolution," in *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, ed. D. Johnston and C. Sampson. (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 165-166.

<sup>898</sup> Wurfel argued that the threat of a peasant-based revolution was greatest, not during the martial law years of the Marcos dictatorship, but during President Aquino's administration, when the NPA had approximately 20,000 members. D. Wurfel, "Land reform: Contexts, accomplishments and prospects under Marcos and Aquino," in *Pilipinas 12* (March 1989) (Online). On land and tenancy reforms, S. Borras, Jr., *Pro-poor Land Reform, A Critique*

increasingly assumed political significance throughout this period, and it was inevitable that the Church would become involved in its political discourse.<sup>899</sup> Land reform was a contentious term, even at the United Nations, which preferred the use of the broader and less precise “agrarian reform.”<sup>900</sup> While among the Philippine bishops there were certainly differences in opinion on the position of the Catholic Church on this issue, the CBCP offered cautious support through the issuance of a pastoral letter:

We are for as *comprehensive* a program of agrarian reform as possible—one that will make it possible for all, the 70% who live below the poverty line especially, *to have* more in order *to be* more (original emphasis).<sup>901</sup>

Some priests would later join the ranks of the CPP, notably Luis Jalandoni, who eventually became a central figure in the armed struggle. By the late 1980s, the Philippines was in a state of political, often violent, flux. The Mendiola Bridge became the site of one of the bloodiest demonstrations in the country on 22 January 1987, when the Philippine Constabulary fired upon members of the *Kilusang Mangbubukid ng Pilipinas* (KMP or the Association of Farmers in the Philippines). In the aftermath, eighteen KMP demonstrators were killed and over 100 were wounded. In March 1988, when land reform was being debated in the House of Congress, Bishop

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(Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007); and, S. Borras, Jr., *The Biting Strategy in Land Reform Implementation: Autonomous Peasant Movements and State Reformists in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 1999).

<sup>899</sup> For Wurfel, agrarian reform is a “pre-requisite—and to some degree a product—of genuine democracy.” Wurfel, “Land reform: Contexts, accomplishments and prospects under Marcos and Aquino.”

<sup>900</sup> In an early United Nations document, land reform was defined as “an integrated programme of measures designed to eliminate obstacles to economic and social development arising out of defects in agrarian structure.” This less politically demanding term was commonly termed “agrarian reform,” in contradiction to the “redistribution of property or rights in land for the benefit of small farmers and agricultural labourers.” The last definition is from D. Warriner, *Land Reform in Principle and Practice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), xiv. Warriner’s oversimplistic conceptualization of land reform, however, had been criticized. See for instance, E. Tuma, “Reviewed work: *Land Reform in Principle and Practice* by Doreen Warriner,” in *Agricultural History* Vol. 44 No. 4 (October 1970), 413-415 (Online). Also Hung-chao Tsai, *Land Reform and Politics: A Comparative Analysis* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1974), especially Chapter II, Concept of Land Reform.

<sup>901</sup> Cf Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 6, quoted in J. Riedinger, *Agrarian Reform in the Philippines, Democratic Transitions and Redistributive Reform* (Stanford, California: Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University, Stanford University Press, 1995), 151.



Teodoro Bacani led the first pro-land reform rally organized by the Catholic Church.<sup>902</sup>

In Ormoc, however, there was relative peace throughout the 1970s and 80s, unlike in other parts of the country where social unrest became real problems of insurgency. While poverty was acute among sugarcane workers, the lack of large sugar centrals and extensive plantations in Ormoc, as well as the absence of an oppressive monopoly of a small number of hacendero families, contributed to the relative calm on the few haciendas that existed during this time. In addition, while the Archdiocese of Palo did send clandestine missions to Ormoc to investigate the plight of hacienda laborers, nothing concrete came out of these missions.<sup>903</sup> The history of the Church's involvement in Ormoc society since 1850—when Ormoc was formally separated from being a *visita* of Palompon and recognized as an independent parish<sup>904</sup>—had been one of accommodation with leading hacendero families and, thus, contributed to a generally peaceful relationship.

It is notable that from the 1870s till 1904, Ormoc had produced at least eight native priests. The most notable of these was Reverend Father Ismael Cataag, who founded and established the Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, a pioneer Catholic school in Leyte and forerunner of Saint Peter's College (SPC) under the management of the Compania de Jesus.<sup>905</sup> Some of the priests who served in Ormoc were linked to prominent families, who remained notable names in politics:

Prospero Esmero	-	Ordained on 28 September 1873
Enrique Carillo	-	Ordained on 13 August 1876

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<sup>902</sup> Wurfel, "Land reform: Contexts, accomplishments and prospects under Marcos and Aquino" (online).

<sup>903</sup> Reverend Olalio Loperando (pseudonym), interview with author, 30 August 2013, in Tacloban City, in English.

<sup>904</sup> Emil Justimbaste, Ormoc's de facto historian, argues that Ormoc was never a barrio of Palompon, but was only temporarily a *visita* of that municipality. In fact, according to him, Ormoc was already a pueblo as early as 1768 when the Jesuits left Ormoc and turned over the town to the Augustinians. E. Justimbaste, *Ugmok, A Brief Historical Account*. Accessed 2 June 2015, 4 (Online).

<sup>905</sup> R. Rosal, "Briefing Folder on Ormoc City," Unpublished (Ormoc City Public Library, 1989); St. Peter's College History, Unpublished; and, E. Justimbaste, *Ugmok, A Brief Historical Account*, 30-31.

Gregorio Ortiz	-	Ordained on 3 June 1882
Juan Miroy	-	Ordained on 21 December 1889
Flaviano Daffon	-	Ordained on 17 December 1897
Pelagio Aviles	-	Ordained on 1 November 1898
Ismael Cataag	-	Ordained on 13 August 1899
Sergio Eamiguel	-	Ordained on 5 June 1904 <sup>906</sup>

Today, a common perception among residents is that an assignment in Ormoc, especially at the Saints Peter and Paul Parish Church, was a highly coveted post for any priest, as hacendero families were known to be generous patrons and benefactors of the Church.<sup>907</sup>

Programs undertaken by the Palo Archdiocese immediately after November 1991, including those by parish churches in Ormoc, encompassed both the provision of basic necessities and longer-term housing project for survivors. Donations allowed the Archdiocese to purchase a tract of land in 1992, which was later named the San Lorenzo Village. According to Monsignor Jaime Villanueva,

**Monsignor Villanueva:** The collection rose drastically. I could not remember the amount, but the donations came. Many people became generous because of the domino effect of the donations that flowed in. There were many donations that came in. In fact we were able to put up a village from donations.

**Author:** San Lorenzo?

**Villanueva:** Yah. We bought that land and we provided the houses.

<sup>906</sup> E. Justimbaste, *Ibid.* This list, however, does not correspond with the list compiled by the Ormoc Public Library, which shows the following: Bebiano Luciano (1834-49); Catalino Cabada (1849-67); Ceferino Montecillo (1867-73); Juan Seno (1873-92); Lino Codilla (1892-1910); Ismael Cataag (1910-1914); Senon Ocampo (1945-47); Felix Sabenicio (1947-54); Federico Lopusaco (1954-59); Francisco Santiago (1959-71); Filemon Quianzon (1971-81); Pastor Cotiangco (1981-1989); Jaime Villanueva (1989-1997); Benjamin Sabillo (1997-2001); Benjamin Bacierra (2001-2004); Isabelo Abrquez (2004-2005); Bernardo Pantin (2005-2009); and, Gilbert Urbina (2010). R. Rosal, "Briefing Folder on Ormoc City."

<sup>907</sup> Informal conversations with Ormoc parishioners during the author's fieldwork in 2013, in downtown Ormoc.

**Author:** Ah so it is both land and houses?

**Villanueva:** Yes, both came from the donations...

**Author:** How big is the lot, Monsignor?

**Villanueva:** I think it is 2.5 [hectares].

**Author:** And how were the beneficiaries chosen, from among a list?

**Villanueva:** Ah it was the Social Action and under it was the Rehabilitation Group. First you have to...be a victim of the flash flood and you have no house...and then you are really poor...At that time [you] had no means to have your house. There were many teachers, many employees who had no houses. It was also what you call a revelation that there were many people who had no land, no houses of their own. Plenty of them. That was a revelation. Because all the time I did not know that such huge number of people have no houses. They were living along the riverbanks and along the seashore.<sup>908</sup>

Lot titles in San Lorenzo were to be transferred to individual owners after three to five years. But, like the case of Barangay Tambulilid, some original beneficiaries sold these lots to new migrants for easy cash. Monsignor Villanueva observed, "They [referring to the beneficiaries] did not follow the agreement. We had an agreement that...if you did not like anymore the house you had to return it to the diocese."<sup>909</sup> The plan for San Lorenzo Village was to be a showcase of the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC), one that promoted Catholic virtues and values. This plan, however, did not materialize. When asked if San Lorenzo was a failure, Monsignor Villanueva replied rather wistfully,

**Monsignor Villanueva:** Comparing to our plan, it is somewhat a failure because there's a lot [to do] to become a solid Christian community. We had an intervention. We bought a jeepney for their

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<sup>908</sup> Monsignor Jaime Villanueva, interview with author, 30 August 2013, in *Our Lady of Immaculate Conception*, Municipality of Burauen, Leyte, original in English, transcribed by author.

<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

transportation, all the deacons there...were brought there, they had their pastoral, putting up the basic ecclesial community. But ah it did not...

**Author:** Why do you think it failed?

**Villanueva:** Maybe the education component was not so strong and the other thing is that the people have...this short memory. They went back to their old lives.<sup>910</sup>

Legal ownership of the house and lot was the primary problem, according to a recipient in San Lorenzo Village:

**Mrs. Armina Santiago:** That is one of our questions. After five years they said, the house and lot will be given for free...We were given a certificate of occupancy, which shows the measurement of the house, what it was made of whether thatched or plywood and with bamboo floor.

**Author:** How big was it?

**Santiago:** There was 200 square meters, there was ninety-five, there was ninety.

**Author:** And yours?

**Santiago:** For ours, it said ninety-six. They said the title will be given to us after five years but it wasn't given to us at all because we were told we had to pay. Why should we pay? It was said that Caritas<sup>911</sup> in Manila wanted us to pay so we can help others. Some of my neighbors reasoned, why should we pay when these were from donations?

**Author:** The Church bought the lot.

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<sup>910</sup> Ibid.

<sup>911</sup> Caritas is a confederation of religious organizations linked to the Catholic Church.

**Santiago:** Before, they said they will give it within five years and now we should pay? It was because some [beneficiaries] weren't married, they said. Some already had good houses...

**Author:** So right now you still do not have a title?

**Santiago:** No not yet but we had not paid anything.<sup>912</sup>

On the other hand, the Benedictine Sisters at Saint Peter's College (SPC) in downtown Ormoc also organized a relief and rehabilitation program, the latter involving a housing project primarily for employees who had lost homes to the flood. The SPC itself had suffered tremendous damages to its buildings and lost three elementary students, with many other students and employees also losing their homes. The nuns had carefully compiled a list of all these, which was used to keep track of what assistance had been provided.<sup>913</sup> According to a beneficiary, who was also an employee at SPC,

**Mrs. Nita Estevez:** The materials were given...though we had to apply. You cannot choose where to go. It was through raffle draw. Our house was number 85 Block 4 because there were four blocks. We were in Block 4.

**Author:** So all those ninety (lots) were all working for Saint Peter's College...?

**Estevez:** No. We were only fourteen employees here. Right now the only ones who remained are...three, only three because the fourth had just moved there. That fourth one just recently moved in 2000...

**Author:** Do you have the title?

**Estevez:** Yes.

**Author:** When did you get your title?

**Estevez:** 2011.

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<sup>912</sup> Armina Santiago (pseudonym), interview with author, 4 October 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>913</sup> The Order of Saint Benedict (OSB) sisters had been in Ormoc since 1930 when they took over the management of the school.

**Author:** Ah so it is recent. Did you have to spend for everything?

**Estevez:** No. The nuns had a counterpart...but it should have been that after fifteen years everyone should have fully paid. The others promised to pay but until now had not yet paid. According to Sister Remedios...our treasurer who is kind, she said, Nita go and make a loan. For what, Sister? Pay for your lot because it is already the deadline. I said Sister I had already paid a long time ago because I didn't want any debt...

**Author:** So can I ask you how much you paid in total since '93, was it?

**Estevez:** No. It was through salary deduction...it was about 100 plus (pesos) per month. That was it, I said, Sister I cannot agree to a salary deduction because I had children going to school. I said I could only give voluntarily...

**Author:** So how much did you pay in total?

**Estevez:** Twenty-five thousand [pesos].

**Author:** So the Benedictine counterpart is also twenty-five thousand?

**Estevez:** I don't know because the payments were not the same, it depends upon your income...The others only paid eight thousand...It depends on your income. The others did not have any income.

**Author:** Ah so the others were subsidized by the nuns?

**Estevez:** We were asked to submit our income minus our expenses.<sup>914</sup>

Like the Palo Archdiocese's housing project in San Lorenzo Village, however, the Benedictine nuns later left Saint Benedictine Village in Barangay Ipil to manage community building on its own.

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<sup>914</sup> Nita Estevez moved to St. Benedictine Village on 3 May 1993. Estevez, interview with author, 3 September 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

The third relief and rehabilitation program was undertaken by an order of nuns based in Cebu. Compared with the villages in San Lorenzo and Saint Benedictine, both of which had patrons that had physically, financially and logistically withdrawn from these projects just a few years after distributing the lots, the community established by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ), a small congregation of nuns with no prior experience in managing a housing project, came closest to the development of the ideal Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) envisioned by the Church.

### **A vocation to serve the “little ones”<sup>915</sup>**

It must be noted that Catholic women religious congregations had begun to operate in the Philippines as early as the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some of these were cloistered orders, while others established hospitals and schools for young women, particularly for daughters of the new elite.<sup>916</sup> Since then, the social component of their work typically spanned the range of providing feeding programs for poor children, housing for abandoned children and caring for the elderly. However, much of the social and political work undertaken by these women religious had not attracted much scholarly attention. Very little, for example, is known of the role the RSCJ nuns had played in actively shaping the socio-economic and political landscape of the country.

The Foundation of the Sacred Heart of the RSCJ was established in the Philippines on 22 August 1969. During the 1970s, the RSCJ nuns had begun actively working against Martial Law. They joined rallies, heeded the call of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) to provide political education to the religious sector, and was active in the fledgling Task Force Detainees, an organization established by the AMRSP to assist political prisoners during the Martial Law era. Three RSCJ nuns eventually got themselves inside

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<sup>915</sup> Sister Carceller noted of her work in the 1970s: “In my daily interactions with the blind, the deaf, the lame, negative hansenites, and other persons with disabilities, I felt blessed to be among those “little ones” belonging to the kingdom of God.” M. Carceller, “Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Profiles.” Society of the Sacred Heart, 2014 (Online).

<sup>916</sup> C. Barry, “Our prayers were all in Latin to avoid conflict” Women religious and sociopolitical change in the Philippines, 1930s-1970s,” in *Philippine Studies, Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 62: 3-4 (Ateneo de Manila University, 2014), 377-397.

Camp Aguinaldo, the only religious sisters to do so, to hold a vigil with breakaway soldiers on that historic night in February 1986.<sup>917</sup> After the People Power Revolution of 1986, the RSCJ led by Sister Maribel Carceller then shifted its focus to community building in rural areas. Its first community was built in Northern Samar, which was “then the third poorest province in the country, suffering from recurrent typhoons, centuries of government neglect, hunger and underdevelopment, and the resulting insurgency.”<sup>918</sup> The focus of these programs had always been the “little ones,” the marginalized sectors of society, as Sister Maribel noted in a personal vignette:

I joined the Samar Mission in 1991 and for the next ten years, continued the organizing of Basic Ecclesial Communities for the Diocese of Catarman. After learning much from this experience, I headed the Diocesan Political Education Desk and supervised the three Diocesan Social Action Commissions of the three Dioceses of the Island of Samar. There were issues of ideological differences, illegal logging, mining, human rights violation and environmental destruction.

With the inspiration of Chapter 2000’s call for an education that transforms in the spirit of reciprocity, the community took a definitive step in committing ourselves to the people of Northern Samar. We settled into a piece of property which we called Sophie’s Farm and established the SHIFT Foundation (Sacred Heart Institute for Transformative Education). We contributed our presence in youth ministry especially at the University of Eastern Philippines, the management of St. Anthony Academy, the diocesan mission school for poor students, and the running of the Sacred Heart Learning Center for pre-school children. I became executive director of the foundation, and explored ways of contributing to projects in pursuit of the millennium development goals: partnering with the ILO<sup>919</sup> for the

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<sup>917</sup> M. Carceller, “Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Profiles” (online).

<sup>918</sup> Ibid.

<sup>919</sup> International Labor Organization.



elimination of child labor in Northern Samar; with the [Department] of Social Welfare and Development on conditional cash transfers for families in poverty; with the National Anti-Poverty Commission in monitoring pro-poor projects.<sup>920</sup>

The RSCJ today remains active in several projects in the Dioceses of Antipolo, Catarman, Cebu, Cubao, and Palo. In Ormoc, under the Palo Diocese, the project was called Saint Philippine Duchesne Ormoc Worker's Foundation, Inc. (SPDOWFI) located at a steep embankment along the Anilao River in Barangay Luna.

### **A people with no future**

Though they did not have a mission house in Ormoc, the RSCJ—then based in Cebu—was one of the first Catholic congregations that responded immediately after the November 1991 flood. Together with Monsignor Villanueva, a small group of RSCJ nuns went to Barangay Nalunopan to provide basic relief services. Government assistance, focused as it was at the city center, was scarce in the hacienda barangay of Nalunopan. Ten days after the flash flood, food there was still in alarmingly short supply, when survivors in the city center at this time were already receiving regular batches of rations. A hacienda laborer, who promptly went home to Barangay Nalunopan on 15 November 1991 from Manila where she had sought prior medical treatment for her goiter, said of her family's experience:

I arrived to see them with nothing to eat. We also lost our *kaldero* [pot]. All our things were lost which made me cry. It was good I had money, but though I had money there was nothing to buy. I said we will go somewhere the flood did not go. We will buy a *kaldero* there and *banig* [palm mat for sleeping]...It was Monsignor [Villanueva] the priest [who helped] because he passed by us while we were gathering root crops in the field, that was what we were eating. So we were

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<sup>920</sup> M. Carceller, "Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Profiles" (Online).

doing this [pantomimes digging] and if there were tubers then it was okay for us to eat.<sup>921</sup>

So dire was the predicament of families in Barangay Nalunopan that Sister Iraida Sua-an, an energetic nun hailing from Iloilo, was at once struck by a powerful image:

I was walking this way [referring to an area in Purok Uno in Nalunopan], and the devastation from the flood was still utterly visible. The people were so hungry that they were scrabbling in the dirt for root crops to eat. It was then that I had a vision of a suffering Christ. In this vision He told me, this is my sheep, my flock, tend to them. It was here I found my vocation.<sup>922</sup>

Monsignor Villanueva and the nuns not only provided basic relief, but also spiritual comfort through the celebration of masses and some psychosocial activities, such as games for children and community gatherings for survivors. In addition, Monsignor Villanueva performed a *kasalang bayan*, a communal wedding ceremony, to solemnize the union of couples who had been living together without the benefit of marriage.

After several months of relief provision, the RSCJ sisters and Monsignor Villanueva were ready to look for a more committed socio-economic program that would respond not only to the short-term needs of the community, but more importantly to uplifting the lives of these laborers who remained among the poorest of the poor. The RSCJ donated shelters with asbestos roofing, and began providing catechetical seminars aimed at increasing awareness of Catholic values. Informal reading and writing classes were also offered, which proved popular among illiterate laborers who came to the communal chapel for a few hours each night. A community organizer named Dinah was employed and dispatched to oversee these programs.

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<sup>921</sup> Perlita, interview with author, 2 April 2013, in SPDOWFI garden while she worked, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>922</sup> Sister Iraida Sua-an, RSCJ, interview with author, 21 April 2013, in Barangay Nalunopan, original in English.

A non-stock foundation was later incorporated on 29 September 1994 with a validity of thirty years. It was officially named Saint Philippine Duchesne Ormoc Worker's Foundation, Inc. (SPDOWFI), as a tribute to the memory of a Catholic saint sanctified as an intrepid missionary to the Americas. Its incorporators included Monsignor Villanueva, RSCJ nuns (namely, Sisters Amelia Vasquez, Iraida Sua-an, Sonia Aldeguer, and Mirasol Navidad), and eight sugarcane workers.<sup>923</sup> Seven from among these became the association's Board of Trustees. Membership in the association entailed a financial obligation of between 7,125 pesos to 7,500 pesos each for Monsignor Villanueva and the RSCJ sisters and 1,750 pesos each for the workers, which the RSCJ subsidized.

SPDOWFI's objectives were clearly identified, which were lofty ideals but highly radical considering that these families were also laborers dependent on the self-interests of a hacendero. Sister Iraida Sua-an, or Sister Ayds, in conversations in 2013, denied inciting unrest.<sup>924</sup> But even a cursory reading of SPDOWFI's objectives, as enumerated in its Articles of Incorporation, shows a revisionist agenda, which went well beyond the mere establishment of a Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) among the victims of the 1991 flash flood:

1. "To help within the limits of our capacity some families who were victims of the flash flood in Ormoc on November 5, 1991, beginning with the families who are already RSCJ beneficiaries at Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc;
2. To give them some formation towards maturation of their Christian faith;
3. To help them become a basic ecclesial community;
4. To help them get organized into a cooperative;
5. To *buy land to be parcelled out to each family who were flashflood victims*;

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<sup>923</sup> Articles of Incorporation of the RSCJ Association, based on Form No. 1-NS (Ordinary Non-Stock) Form No. 053725, signed on 29 September 1994, in Cebu City.

<sup>924</sup> Informal conversations with Sister Sua-an, 2013.

6. To help them in their self-help and other socio-economic development projects;
7. To help raise funds for their continuing formation and other income-generating projects towards economic self-reliance;
8. To build linkages with cause-oriented individuals and/or groups committed to the empowerment of people towards social transformation to a just and equitable society;
9. To network with existing NGOs / POs which share the same vision and strategy;
10. To do whatever is necessary for the growth and development of these families” (with emphasis).<sup>925</sup>

Objective numbers 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 allude to the formation of a new community that was meant to be self-reliant and resilient through collective self-help. The underlying assumption that guided the incorporators was clear: these families were seen as “people with no future” who had no entitlements and needed help.<sup>926</sup>

Unsurprisingly, by 1998, trouble was brewing with the Larrazabals. Sister Ayds by this time had been tirelessly working and living with the laborers, totally immersing herself in the community, and travelling via ferry to Cebu on a monthly basis, as the RSCJ did not yet have a permanent mission house in Ormoc. She rapidly gained a reputation in the community as a *tibak*, slang for an activist commonly linked to the left, with her characteristic uncovered head and civilian clothes. The only thing that marked her as a nun was a small ubiquitous cross that hung on a chain from her neck. *Tibak* priests and nuns were well known in rural poor areas, with those who had been politicized also shedding their habits and joining the communist movement in far-flung provinces where the agricultural problem was acute. Some even had taken up arms with the NPA.

Unbeknownst to Sister Ayds, the community organizer Dinah was in fact provoking the laborers to mobilize for an increase in their wages, a

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<sup>925</sup> Articles of Incorporation of the RSCJ Association. NGOs are non-government organizations, while POs are people's organizations.

<sup>926</sup> Informal conversations with Sister Sua-an, 2013.

development closely watched by the Larrazabals. Because Dinah was under RSCJ employ, Sister Ayds was suspected of actually fomenting the dissent. Sabin Larrazabal, who owned the sugarcane plantation barangay of Nalunopan, reacted swiftly on these suspicions. Within days, he had Sister Ayds, Dinah and the suspected three laborer-insurgents and their families expelled. He also had the neat row of wooden houses donated by the RSCJ bulldozed to the ground. Sister Ayds was banned from Barangay Nalunopan.

### **The persistence of vulnerability and poverty**

The SPDOWFI, prior to 1998, was already scouting for a piece of land that its members could eventually own. With the expulsion of three laborer families from Barangay Nalunopan, SPDOWFI was galvanized to welcome sugar worker families to a one-hectare plot of land it had purchased from the Tan family just two barangays upland from Barangay Nalunopan. The purchase was fully funded by the RSCJ Mother House in Rome. Not prime location, it stretched downhill from the national highway to a craggy embankment along the Anilao River. In the early 1990s, this piece of land was classified as idle, the soil too wet and rocky for agriculture. It was overgrown with grasses, various trees and bamboo along the riverbanks and was populated by snakes. Moving to this new home, small tragedies continued to hound the laborers, as one recounted:

**Inday:** It was difficult because it was still forest here at the start since we were the first ones here. We cleaned it...We were three families who were banished by the Larrazabals. Our house was padlocked.

**Author:** Ah so a case was filed against you?

**Inday:** Yes a case was filed against us.

**Author:** What happened to the case?

**Inday:** We were given only food, money for food.

**Tonyang** (Inday's wife): How much was it they gave you Pa, two thousand?

**Inday:** Only four thousand for me.

**Author:** Are you the only one given the money? What was the four thousand for?

**Inday:** It was only for financial, only for food. We weren't paid for the length of service in their hacienda.

**Author:** What happened? So you left your house there?

**Inday:** Yes.

**Author:** Who lived there then?

**Inday:** We settled it with DOLE.<sup>927</sup> They talked to us. We were supposed to get eighteen thousand that was what we signed when we agreed at Pongos [Hotel]...but we got only four thousand per person and in the contract it said our houses will be demolished but it will be their truck to deliver the materials, that was it. So they gave us only four thousand.

**Author:** Did they give it to you in cash?

**Inday:** Yes cash...They padlocked our houses.

**Author:** The owner padlocked them?

**Inday:** Yes!

**Author:** So you couldn't go back?

**Inday:** If we went back there they said we would be killed. The owner was *kaisog* [strict, hard].

**Author:** But you were able to get your things?

**Inday:**...Oh no, we didn't even have our clothes.

**Author:** Even your clothes?

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<sup>927</sup> DOLE is the Department of Labor and Employment.

**Inday:** None.<sup>928</sup>

At the start, only forty families including the three suspected “insurgents” heeded the invitation to form a new community at the edge of Barangay Luna, a 210-hectare sugar-producing barangay dominated by the haciendas of the Torres, Serafica and Tan families. More laborer families would have moved, except for several superstitious stories that told of how SPDOWFI’s topography was a “kawa” or giant wok, which attracted death, disease and other unlucky events.<sup>929</sup> In addition, though Purok II-B was not too far away from Nalunopan, for many the move also meant severing ties to families and friends, as some would have to leave behind brothers and sisters, elderly parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and neighbors.

The original dream for SPDOWFI was for one hectare to be equally divided into forty lots for allocation to sugar laborer families. Seven of these lots were to be used as an organic garden initially planned for common use, the construction of the main RSCJ house and center, a staff house, a daycare center, a chapel, and a multi-purpose building, all to be fully funded by the RSCJ. By this time, Monsignor Villanueva, though an original incorporator, had moved away from Ormoc. Consequently, membership in the Board of Trustees became fully RSCJ, with the result that interaction with the Saints Peter and Paul Parish, and by extension the Archdiocese of Palo, decreased significantly.

SPDOWFI’s first few years in Purok II-B in Barangay Luna were idyllic, as there was no electricity and the community came together every night for some singing, guitar playing, and story telling.<sup>930</sup> Water, too, was untapped so washing clothes and taking baths in the riverbanks of Anilao became a community get-together. One recipient recounted how it was in the beginning,

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<sup>928</sup> Inday and Tonyang (pseudonyms, husband and wife), simultaneous interviews with author, in their own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, 8 March 2013, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>929</sup> Lorna and Myrna (pseudonyms, mother and daughter), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 May 2013, Ibid. This was confirmed in informal conversations with residents of Nalunopan who had relocated to Barangay Luna II-B, as well as with Sister Ayds Sua-an.

<sup>930</sup> Conversations with Sister Sua-an, 2013.

**Nita:** Before when we were not here yet, they said, around this hour there were *aswangs*<sup>931</sup> [chuckling]...They were already noisy...here in Barangay Luna. It was scary here they said.

**Author:** Because there were not any houses yet?

**Nita:** Hm there were not any houses yet, very few.

**Author:** But you really had experiences with *aswangs*?

**Nita:** Here? Gosh, many! [chuckling]...the *wakwak*<sup>932</sup>...especially when the moon is brightest.

**Author:** When did you have electricity here?

**Nita:** I do not know. Ma, when did we have electricity here?

**Primitiva** (her mother): When the house was finished, '98 perhaps, '99.<sup>933</sup>

In the morning, everyone was busy with clearing the area, constructing houses, tending to the communal garden, and building the structures that would become RSCJ's home. Several attempts were made during this period by suspicious individuals wishing to make contact with Sister Ayds, the lone nun living amongst the poorest of the poor. The bids for contact may have been "feelers" sent by the insurgent NPA, who were said to live in the surrounding hills and mountains. However, Sister Ayds disregarded all these, exclaiming, "I am not a communist!"<sup>934</sup>

Yet in this new haven, life began to unravel. Within three to four years from relocating, a majority decided to take down their houses and return to Barangay Nalunopan. The common reason was the lack of livelihood in Barangay Luna. Sabin Larrazabal, who was known as a fair though strict

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<sup>931</sup> An *aswang* is a popular mythical creature in the Philippines that has vampire and ghoulish characteristics.

<sup>932</sup> The *wakwak*, on the other hand, is also a form of *aswang*, but is characterized as a creature that flies with bat wings and leaves the lower half of the body behind.

<sup>933</sup> Primitiva and Nita (pseudonyms, mother and daughter), simultaneous interviews with author, 18 March 2013, in their own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>934</sup> Conversations with Sister Ayds Sua-an, 2013.



man, allowed the returnees to come back to work and they picked up their lives as laborers, as though they had never left.

For those who stayed in Barangay Luna, the lack of sources of income was simply a matter of substituting one problem in Barangay Nalunopan for another, as one original recipient succinctly observed:

It is different here because over there [referring to Barangay Nalunopan] we never had to pay for water. Here you pay for everything, anything. Though it is cheap here, over there I did not even have to buy *malunggay* [moringa oleifera] because I had planted a lot of them...Here you cannot plant anything because it is just the house. You will have to plant at the sides of the house.<sup>935</sup>

Though the original housing project was intended for flood laborer-survivors from Nalunopan, the exodus of recipient families out of Luna and the resulting empty lots forced RSCJ to open the community to other urban poor families in and around Ormoc. Only eight original families remain today, while thirty-one were new migrants.

An informal survey, conducted by the RSCJ in the late 2000s, showed that only three out of thirty-nine families were female-headed households, while majority was male-dominated. Most of them claimed that the reason they wanted to become part of the community was because of the chance to own land where to raise their families. Based on this survey, a typical family was headed by a man aged forty-two years, had an average of three children, with both him and his wife at least elementary graduates. A man's common employment was in the informal sector as driver, gardener, technician, electrician, mechanic, carpenter, mason, and waiter, while his wife was typically a housewife or, like her husband, worked in the informal sector as a beautician, vendor or housekeeper.<sup>936</sup> The average income of an original recipient family, who dealt in manual labor, was about 200 to 250

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<sup>935</sup> Soling, interview with author, 30 May 2013, in her own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, original in Bisaya and Filipino, when asked about whether life at present in Luna was better or worse than in Nalunopan, transcribed and translated by author.

<sup>936</sup> "Profile of resident-beneficiaries of the St. Philippine Duchesne's Ormoc Workers Foundation, Inc. (SPDOWFI)," RSCJ files, as of 2013.

pesos per day for a family of five, but work was irregular. On the other hand, the newer migrant families had more diverse sources of income, with some working as tricycle drivers with a take-home pay of about 250 pesos per day after deducting the boundary paid to the owner as well as gas. Others were salesmen and technicians with higher daily incomes.

With the influx of new migrants in Purok II-B, the profile of the community changed drastically from the original hacienda laborers of Nalunopan, who were either illiterate or with only some elementary education. As a result, laborer families became the minority, and while their lives became poorer for lack of more sustainable sources of income, their new neighbors—though themselves still living below the official poverty line—began to flourish. Some of the migrant families could afford to have electricity and tapped water, own television, cell phones, radios and DVD players, and were able to go to the city for some recreation. Like in Barangay Tambulilid, the most obvious symbol of rising incomes was the construction of cemented houses with corrugated iron roofs. One migrant family for instance, who had a daughter who was pregnant by an elderly Canadian man in 2013 and another daughter who was pushed to have only foreigner boyfriends, was able to put up a painted and cemented house from the regular remittances sent by the Canadian boyfriend, the envy of many in the community. As such, all families with daughters in Purok II-B—though they were not yet of marriageable age—dreamed of having a foreigner son-in-law, who would rescue them from the grinding poverty of everyday life.<sup>937</sup>

### **The morality and coping strategies of the poorest of the poor**

The SPDOWFI community was nominally Catholic, which meant that every family sent representatives to join meetings, processions and other religious activities regularly organized by Sister Ayds Sua-an. But other than these outward shows of religiosity, Catholic virtues were non-existent. It was notable that the norm among couples was not to be wed at all, but simply to live together as husband and wife. Marriage, too, was not a pre-requisite for

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<sup>937</sup> Informal conversations with SPDOWFI residents, in February to October 2013, in Barangay Luna, Ormoc City.

availing a lot in the community. One woman, who has had three husbands and supported a household of twenty-one individuals on her husband's salary as a security guard in downtown Ormoc and from remittances sent occasionally by a daughter living in Makati City as a kept woman of a Danish man, had this to say when asked how many were living in her house:

**Teresita:** Many, there are many families.

**Author:** How many families?

**Roland** (her adult son): There are many, almost twenty persons...

**Teresita:** We are four families here [laughter in the background] Ay...it is the truth!

**Author:** How many children did you have in all?

**Teresita:** Ours were only four, for the first, there were many, eight?

**Author:** What first? Is this your second husband, with four (children)?

**Teresita:** Yes.

**Roland:** This is the third.

**Teresita:** I was widowed in the first...

**Roland:** This is going to be a long story.

**Author:** You were first widowed, no children?

**Teresita:** We had two.

**Author:** Where are they living?

**Teresita:** One is here. The other is in Manila. We should be ashamed to tell lies, we should tell the truth.

**Roland** (teasing his mother): You are a holy mother...

**Author:** And with your second husband?

**Teresita:** Six.

**Roland:** That's now eight.

**Author:** ...Did he also die?

**Teresita:** No! He was crazy! [laughter in the background] He abandoned us.

**Author:** But you still see him? He gives you money?

**Teresita:** No! When he leaves you and you get another husband, will he still give you money? [chuckling]

**Author:** So when he left you, you were already here?

**Teresita:** No when he left Nalunopan there were only five of them. He left when I was five months pregnant...So he didn't send any money even when I had given birth, nothing until the baby grew. So I went to see him at his father's house, because I had such difficulty raising my children. If he had only pitied me. He was living a bachelor's life. Should he not have raised his six children? This is the truth so we had to save on our own [chuckling].

**Author:** Where are your six children with your second husband?

**Teresita:** Here, the others are in Manila...aw the sixth one died...I have adopted one recently.

**Author:** Why did you adopt? Who did you adopt?

**Roland:** (A baby) six days old...

**Teresita:** The baby of my father-in-law who is 74 years old and who is with the daughter of Edna Tamayo.<sup>938</sup> I adopted the baby because I pitied him as he might die because their first baby did die...

**Author:** Ah so you are relatives with *Aling* Edna?

**Teresita:** Yes we are *mares*<sup>939</sup>...

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<sup>938</sup> The story was that Edna Tamayo's mentally challenged daughter was betrothed to a man, who brought her home to his father's house. The father fancied this girl and took her for his own wife.

**Author:** Why was the baby left with you? Isn't the father still alive?

**Teresita:** He is old so he could no longer provide for the baby. Because he is 74 years old and his wife is useless, she is mentally disabled...

**Author:** The baby is newly born, right?

**Teresita:**...On the twenty-second [of May 2013].

**Author:** So who feeds him?

**Teresita:** We do.

**Angie** (an adult daughter): Only through a bottle...

**Author:** It's more expenses.

**Teresita:** It's all right. God will have pity...

**Author:** If you did not adopt this baby, where will he go?

**Teresita:** He will be given away ma'am, she [the mother] was already contacting someone there...so I had to get him. It would be up to God if we eat only *ginamos*.<sup>940</sup>

**Author:** So you are 21 here in the house including the baby?

**Teresita:** Yes.<sup>941</sup>

The twist in this story came just a few months after the interview above, when her second husband was brought back to live with her and her large family—alone, paralyzed from a stroke, and desperate for help.

The backgrounds of other Purok II-B residents were no less fascinating, if only to emphasize how Catholicism was ever practiced and how poverty continually shaped the choices people made, their lifestyles and values,

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<sup>939</sup> *Mare* (Filipino): two women joined by the marriage of their children or other non-related people.

<sup>940</sup> *Ginamos* (Bisaya): small fermented shrimps commonly cooked with vegetables. In very poor provinces of the Visayas, eating *ginamos* with rice is the ultimate symbol of poverty.

<sup>941</sup> Teresita, Roland and Angie (pseudonyms, mother, son and daughter), simultaneous interviews with author, 29 May 2013, in their own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya and Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

sometimes with total disregard for Catholic virtues that were not personally beneficial. Edna Tamayo<sup>942</sup>, for instance, who was one of the original accused ‘insurgents’ at Barangay Nalunopan, flagrantly pursued a relationship with a lesbian, who did the chores around her house commonly undertaken by a man. She stopped going to Church soon after transferring to Purok II-B and suffered from hypertension, and had a reputation as an amateur dabbler in *kulam*.<sup>943</sup> Another resident, a man named Abner Cosomo,<sup>944</sup> was a well-known drug dealer in Ormoc, who in the past had occasionally bullied and challenged Sister Ayd’s authority. Yet another couple, the husband and wife Inday and Tonyang Jumat-ol—also laborers from Nalunopan who remained among the poorest in Purok II-B because of several tragedies—like deaths and illnesses in the family that constantly wiped out savings—were not flood survivors at all because they were not in Ormoc in 1991. But Inday and Tonyang continued to keep up the lie because of the promise of owning land.<sup>945</sup> A previous common-law husband with whom she had borne six children had repeatedly raped Perlita,<sup>946</sup> another former hacienda laborer. She later ran away, abandoning her children and husband in Mindanao, and got married to a man with whom she had two more children, but who also physically abused her, was an alcoholic and flaunted his women. Perlita’s situation changed, not because of any intervention from SPDOWFI or even the RSCJ, but because her husband had become paralyzed after two strokes and could no longer hit her. Perlita herself was a *tambal*, a faith healer, who occasionally smoked and had a penchant for *tuba* (fermented palm), vices that further depleted the family income.

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<sup>942</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>943</sup> *Kulam* (Filipino): folkloric magic using herbs, earth, fire, spices, candles, oils and the like to perform rituals, charms and spells.

<sup>944</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>945</sup> Edna Tamayo (pseudonym), interview with author, 28 May 2013, in a hut in front of her own home where she was selling barbequed pork, in Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Some parts of the interview had been difficult to understand because Edna was whispering and the background noise of passing tricycles and crowing roosters drowned out her voice. Edna stated that Tonyang and Inday were in fact in Cebu on 5 November 1991 and it was Tonyang’s father (Tonya was in fact Edna’s sister-in-law) who was the one who had been “washed out” during that flood. But Inday and Tonyang came to Ormoc after the flood. I followed this rumor up with Sister Ayds later on, but she did not want to discuss this at length, and instead referred me to Nita, who was Sister Sua-an’s assistant. Ate Nita, too, claimed not to know anything about this matter.

<sup>946</sup> Perlita, informal conversations with author, 2013.

In the beginning, it was Sister Ayds who was unwittingly pushed into the role of *agonal*, the father figure for a community morally underdeveloped like children. As “boss” and father, she was seen to hold the veto power in matters concerning the community. For all intents and purposes, she was the *agonal*, who knew everything about everyone, and as such, was feared, respected and oftentimes resented. A small community like SPDOWFI was a hotbed of gossip, and Sister Ayds was the repository of all kinds of information about any of the residents. She knew that one family had a bout with leprosy, even though they had kept it secret to avoid the shame and discrimination that usually accompanied the disease. She was suspicious that the husband of a woman in SPDOWFI might have climbed over the wall of a house next to the community one night and raped the daughter of the house, though a case was never filed and the family simply moved away. She knew that the Canadian man who was benefactor to one family was also “married” to two other girls in Cebu and Mindanao. She was aware that a son of another resident might be gay, despite the obvious denial of his mother. She was the one who sent some of the residents’ children to university through scholarships. At Christmas, she also distributed groceries as gifts, much like a responsible *agonal*. She organized masses for the community and regular *pintakasi* programs, clean-up activities in shared areas in the community every Sunday. She actively sought networking activities with the larger RSCJ community around the world so that French, German and American volunteers regularly came to SPDOWFI for immersion of at least three months.

Most importantly, Sister Ayds was the one people ran to for help, when all else failed. This frequently occurred when it came to credit. When the mother of Tonyang Jumat-ol died, for example, the family ran to Sister Ayds, who provided the money for burial. When Inday was struck with hypertension and could no longer find work, it was Sister Ayds who extended help through scholarships for some of the children to continue going to school, as he noted:

**Inday:** I still have a lot of debt to Sister.

**Tonyang** (his wife): We run to Sister...when his mother died we ran to Sister. We owe a lot to Sister.

**Inday:** That time when I had to stop work we ran to Sister.

**Tonyang:** He couldn't work anymore because he had bleeding.<sup>947</sup>

But a steady source of credit from RSCJ was not sustainable. Sabin Larrazabal, as *agalon* in the hacienda, had dispensed loans that could be considered as salary advance and thus were deducted from the wages of the following weeks. Sister Ayds, however, did not have any way to ensure that a loan was repaid.

It was notable that in 2006, the RSCJ opened a day-care center in Purok II-B—the Sacred Heart Children's Educational Center (SHCEC)—originally meant to educate the SPDOWFI children. As such, funds for other purposes such as small credit dried up. When ready credit stopped, resentment from residents began. The SHCEC building was erected in 2008, and a feeding program for pupils, in conjunction with day-care instruction, was fully subsidized for the first three to six years by the RSCJ Mother House. By 2013, most of the thirty enrolled pupils were not SPDOWFI residents, as most children in the community were no longer of day-care age. Two volunteer teachers were paid honoraria equivalent to two hours of work per day amounting to 3,500 pesos per month. It was through the personal pledge of a German civilian who had heard of SHCEC's work, Mr. Peter Pluckebaüm of the Knights of Rizal Bonne Chapter, that the day-care center was able to guarantee continued operation, at least for several more years. But the school remained in the hands of Sister Ayds, who single-handedly recruited pupils and teachers, managed daily operations, and paid the salaries and other monetary benefits of the volunteer teachers and assistants, who came from among the residents. It was the same situation with the backyard garden, which had been originally planned for communal use. But because the community did not take good care of the garden, Sister

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<sup>947</sup> Inday and Tonyang, interview with the author, 8 March 2013, in front of their own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, where Tonyang was doing the laundry, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.



Ayds eventually closed it and tended the garden herself. There were indeed many reasons for the residents to resent the authority exercised by one petite nun.

SPDOWFI, since its establishment in 1998 in Purok II-B in Barangay Luna, was also—whether consciously or not—a closed community, which meant that it did not encourage collaboration with the barangay to which it was part. Politically, it was classified as Purok II-B, as a former barangay captain explained:

**Former barangay captain:** We divided Purok II into two, Purok II-A over there and Purok II-B. It was because there were already so many houses...so Purok II-B should be included. We wanted Purok II-B to be recognized...

**Author:** What does being Purok II-B mean, that during [barangay] meetings it should also have a vote?

**Former barangay captain:** There is no councilor, no *kagawad*<sup>948</sup> so [Purok II-B] could not be involved...

**Author:** What does it mean being a *purok*, that it has a budget in the barangay?

**Former barangay captain:** None. It doesn't have a budget but it depends on the [barangay] captain. So there isn't a budget, right? Then the captain should undertake steps [to pursue programs] like those for health.<sup>949</sup>

As it was, institutional relations with Purok II-B were non-existent, as the former barangay captain elaborated:

...Our objective in the barangay was to have rough roads cemented. But Sister won't agree!...so what can we do when the houses were

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<sup>948</sup> A barangay councilor, an elected barangay official.

<sup>949</sup> Interview with a former barangay captain of Barangay Luna, 15 May 2013, in his own home, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, accompanied by Ate Nita, transcribed and translated by author. Transcription includes background sounds of passing traffic, crowing roosters and murmur of the television.

there and you wanted to ride a motorcycle? It is rough road. It is difficult. So relations between SPDOWFI and the barangay may not be so good. But Sister is [a] good [person]. Though in general she follows whatever had been decided at the top. But Sister relates well, though it seems that SPDOWFI is so distant from the barangay.<sup>950</sup>

Sister Ayds confirmed a distrust of political institutions and elected officials in general, including for those at the barangay level. At the ideological level, she was afraid that given a chance, politics would corrupt the community when it was still so fragile and defeat the purpose set out at the very beginning of building a sustainable, resilient and self-reliant community. On the critical issue of cementing the road inside SPDOWFI, she believed that once the barangay had cemented it with government funds, SPDOWFI would become powerless in controlling entry into and exit from the community. As such, she urged residents to contribute equally to have the road built on their own, a suggestion that the community resisted. There was disagreement over how much each household should contribute, with the poorer households insisting that those with automobiles should shoulder a higher amount than those without jeepneys or motorcycles. After several meetings over several years that brought no satisfactory solutions, the issue was sidelined and the paths were allowed to deteriorate. During the rainy season, SPDOWFI became dangerous trails of slippery mud and rocks. Still the community refused to budge, and Sister Ayds remained implacable, first about subsidizing this particular project and second, about asking the barangay to shoulder the costs. The issue of the road had thus become an impasse. But the problem won't disappear, as there were plans to begin subdividing the lot and transferring titles to residents, which will occur in the lead-up to the closing of SPDOWFI by 2024.

### **The intractable problem of vulnerability**

Measuring success rates in reconstruction and community building after a disaster remains a challenging task, as there is really no one formula in

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<sup>950</sup> Ibid.

determining success or failure.<sup>951</sup> What appears crucial to success are the levels of community participation and community empowerment especially in improving access to information and services, and therefore decision-making.<sup>952</sup> Nonetheless, the recovery of a community “as a whole” after a disaster does not automatically mean that “specific neighborhoods or households within those neighborhoods recover at the same rate or even at all.”<sup>953</sup> As such, to evaluate a community as a unit in the aftermath of a disaster can be misleading.

This was certainly true in the case of SPDOWFI, which has seen the original laborer families replaced by migrants over the years. These migrants were economically better off than the original residents even at the start. For those who came from Nalunopan, the most notable change experienced in Luna II-B had been the freedom to work where they wished, if there was work. But hunger was the same, as there was also hunger in Barangay Luna when there was no work, as this resident attested:

**Perlita:** Well we are used to eating three times a day...

**Author:** So you have never experienced hunger, for example in one week you ate less than three times a day? Have you had any experience like that?

**Perlita:** Majority of the time.

**Author:** Why was that?

**Perlita:** We would just have porridge [*lugaw*].

**Author:** It depended on what?

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<sup>951</sup> C. Davidson, C. Johnson, G. Lizarralde, N. Dikmen, and A. Sliwinski, “Truths and myths about community participation in post-disaster housing projects,” in *Habitat International* (Elsevier Ltd, 2006). DOI:10.1016/j.habitatint.2006.08.003.

<sup>952</sup> Aside from these two factors, three other factors were identified: quality of communication and information dissemination that increase people’s awareness of existing opportunities for participation; respect and consideration of community culture and beliefs; and, the support of local governments. Z. Sadiqi “Wardak,” V. Coffey and B. Trigunarsyah, “Critical factors for successful housing reconstruction projects following a major disaster,” in *Proceedings of the 19<sup>th</sup> Triennial CIB World Building Congress*, ed. S. Kajewski, K. Manley & K. Hampson (Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD, 2013), 2.

<sup>953</sup> M. Lindell, “Recovery and reconstruction after disaster,” in *Encyclopedia of Natural Hazards*, ed. P.T. Bobrowsky (Springer, 2013), 812 (Online).

**Perlita:** Especially that time when he [referring to her husband] got sick...he was sick six months and I could not work, could not do anything except take care of him. I could not heal others.<sup>954</sup> I could not leave him.

**Author:** Because you could not leave him with anyone?

**Perlita:** No one at all.

**Author:** You could not leave him with other people, for example?

**Perlita:** No.

**Author:** With your children?

**Perlita:** Especially not with my daughter because she has a baby. We were eating only donated dole-outs. It is because his illness was difficult. What if he became contagious?

**Author:** What is his illness that is contagious?

**Perlita:** He was vomiting blood. When his blood [pressure] goes up, he vomits blood. The doctor said so long as we do not become complacent, he would not be contagious. We were told there should be only one person taking care of him. That is only me. So [we were eating] only dole-outs...

**Author:** So you were like that for six months?

**Perlita:** Six months. It is only now I could work.

**Author:** So when you were still in Nalunopan how many times do you eat in a day?

**Perlita:** Before the flood?

**Author:** Yes even before the flood.

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<sup>954</sup> Perlita was a *tambal*, or faith healer of sorts, and a manghihiilot. Her two children were all over twenty, with families of their own.

**Perlita:** Sometimes there was nothing to eat. We ate a lot of *niyog* [coconuts]. It was difficult for us over there [referring to Nalunopan]...

**Author:** So now what do you usually eat? There is always rice, right?

**Perlita:** Yes rice.

**Author:** And then?

**Perlita:** We do not really have anything else to eat.

**Author:** Vegetables?

**Perlita:** We will buy vegetables when we have money. When we do not have any, then there is nothing.

**Author:** So how would you cook the rice?

**Perlita:** Sometimes as porridge. Sometimes when there is nothing, just rice with water and salt. It was possible to survive.

**Author:** So in your opinion did you eat better since you transferred here or when you were still in Nalunopan?

**Perlita:** Here...it was difficult over there.

**Author:** Life was more difficult over there?

**Perlita:** You would not eat if you do not work...because you had to buy rice everyday.<sup>955</sup>

For these former hacienda workers, deaths and frequent illnesses exacerbated vulnerability, driving them deeper into a spiral of precarious financial uncertainties, with ramifications in terms of poorer health, inability to save anything at all, lesser finances that could be allocated for food and medicines, and even stopping children's education. This situation was not any different for former hacienda workers who elected to stay in Purok II-B compared with those who returned to Nalunopan to resume life as laborers.

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<sup>955</sup> Perlita, interview with author, 2 April 2013, original in Filipino, when asked about eating patterns, how many times in a day the family ate, transcribed and translated by author. Transcription includes sounds of passing traffic in the background.

Those who returned also experienced the same kinds of economic uncertainties, but at least they could look forward to earning seventy pesos per day of work so long as they could work. The SPDOWFI former laborers did not have this confidence, but instead had to rely on new skills to survive, such as being a carpenter, mason, security guard, or selling various things in the market downtown.

For those who came from other parts of the city other than Barangay Nalunopan, the main change was the fact that money freed from rent—as they no longer needed to pay rent or residential taxes<sup>956</sup>—could be used for something else, such as food, health, education, savings, small businesses, etc. In fact one family had been successful in doing just this by expanding its business from retailing only several kilos of pork a day to owning and operating a large piggery in the town of Merida in Leyte in the short time they had transferred to SPDOWFI. The family originally came from Merida, a fifth class municipality next to Ormoc with about 27,000 residents based on a 2010 census. Although not exactly classified as rural or urban poor, Sister Ayds granted permission for the family to join the community in the early 2000s because they were earning only an average of about 5,000 pesos a month from their retail business. The family's economic status rapidly improved, with the most visible change seen in the house. According to Sister Ayds, this family, along with others like them, sustained the community as they funded activities when asked or required.<sup>957</sup> They also influenced consultation processes with the rest of the community residents through strategic voting and sharing of opinions, which usually mirrored Sister Ayds' own positions. Interestingly, during a community meeting to which I was able to attend and which Sister Ayds convened to discuss the titling and distribution of individual lots, the most vocal and active were new migrant families. The original settlers, numbering only eight in 2013, were more quiet, shy and hesitant to express their own thoughts especially about financial

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<sup>956</sup> As SPDOWFI was a foundation, land tax was charged at a minimum, which the foundation first paid and was then passed on to residents equally. Annual tax was approximately 52 pesos per lot.

<sup>957</sup> Informal conversations with Sister Ayds Sua-an, 2013.

matters.<sup>958</sup> The issue during the meeting was primarily the costs involved in having their lots titled.

Nonetheless, the main source of uncertainty for all residents stemmed from the fact that they did not yet have the title to their lot, which meant that they could still be expelled from the community. According to one female resident, aged forty-nine years, when asked whether she planned to retire in SPDOWFI:

**Daning:** Maybe [laughing]...we do not have any place else to go to, to move to.

**Author:** Why, would you still want to move?

**Daning:** I do not know, I do not think I do, I think I like it here.<sup>959</sup>

What was left unsaid of course was that staying in the community was ultimately Sister Ayds' decision, so long as the mother title was still undivided. Upon further informal conversations among residents, an underlying fear of Sister Ayds could be discerned, as she was seen as increasingly distant and aloof from the community.

In this chapter, vulnerability features many fascinating characteristics. First, though a community is classified as generally poor, vulnerability varies per family based on a combination of factors, which include economic status, occupation, gender, disability and health status, age, number of dependents, nutrition, and educational attainment. All these determine the degree to which a family is put at risk after subsequent hazard events. As such, resilience in a community is logically uneven, as other families will be found to be more at risk than others. Second, vulnerability is more persistent among families found at the lower end of the risk spectrum, with some experiencing a spiraling cause and effect of less income resulting in less nutrition and poorer health, which in turn leads to the inability to work and so on. The poorest families had the worst health, with many of them afflicted

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<sup>958</sup> The community meeting was held on 23 June 2013, 7:30 p.m. at the Sacred Heart garden.

<sup>959</sup> Daning (pseudonym), interview with author, 29 May 2013, in her own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

with a variety of illnesses that hindered their ability to earn consistent livelihoods. What often occurred as a result was that children were pulled out of school to compensate for the loss of income, thereby severely curtailing the youth's ability to earn more if they had been allowed to finish their schooling. Third, vulnerability as shown in this chapter appears not only "time-bound"<sup>960</sup>, but more importantly place-bound, which means that the area of residence greatly determines the level of vulnerability that a family can experience. Areas that lack opportunities for livelihoods and sources of employment were far from the city center, and which entailed more cost in travelling to the city. These influence a family's ability to cope and get back up on its feet after a disaster. This is especially true of hacienda laborers who had both stayed in Luna II-B and those who returned to Nalunopan. Finally, families with sons and daughters who work elsewhere and regularly send home remittances to their families were less vulnerable than those without children who helped augment family income. In times of disaster events, these remittances became lifelines to family members who stay behind. What these cases of families have shown is that it is not only that the "poor suffer more from hazards than do the rich."<sup>961</sup> More importantly, the poor themselves do not suffer vulnerability equally, with some bearing more of the burden than others. It is these families who need assistance the most, but who were also left out of long-term programs of risk mitigation, sacrificed for the sake of a majority who are able to cope with minimum help.

The role of the Catholic Church and Church-affiliated groups and organizations is crucial in identifying the poorest of these poor families and in providing valuable interventions to stop the cycle of vulnerability and poverty. Yet based on the SPDOWFI case, donor fatigue and a lack of systematic programs designed to uplift these families' situations in a pro-active manner and not just unwittingly engender dependency among them must be addressed, if any long-term program of risk management can be achieved.

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<sup>960</sup> Wisner, Blaikie et al., *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>961</sup> Wisner et al, *Op.Cit.* Wisner et al define the 'time-bound' element of vulnerability as what "can be measured in terms of the damage to future livelihoods, and not just what happens to life and property at the time of the hazard event."



## CONCLUSION: VULNERABILITY IN DISASTER AFTERMATH

*That's the question that has always been asked to me as Chairman of the Committee on Public Safety. Are you ready? The answer I always give is we are not ready.*

- Jose Alfaro, interview with the author, 19 March 2013, in Ormoc City Hall, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author

*We will never forget! A child who had experienced a flood will carry the memory to his old age.*

- Rico, interview with the author, 21 April 2013, in Barangay Nalunopan, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author

The Ormoc disaster of 1991 was not natural. It did not come about because of a capricious nature. While it was triggered by a weak but slow-moving typhoon, which had caused the Anilao and Malbasag rivers to quickly swell up and rush towards the city settlements, the massive death and destruction that resulted was very much caused by human activities. Many of these activities had been institutionalized as government policies over many decades and even over a century. That the 1991 Ormoc disaster was a consequence of urbanization and socio-economic development cannot be overemphasized. These twin processes had continuously rationalized the existence of a growing society, which also was increasingly characterized by unequal access to wealth and resources, the marginalization of pockets of poor communities, and the creation of uneven levels of vulnerability among specific groups of people. Bankoff's conception of disaster not as an event, but a historical process that "normalizes risk", is certainly true in the case of Ormoc in 1991.<sup>962</sup>

What is most glaring in the assessment of the 1991 Ormoc tragedy is the continuing lack of wide-ranging accountability at all levels of society. Despite the series of investigative reports written about the flood and its

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<sup>962</sup> G. Bankoff, "Vulnerability as a measure of change in society," in *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* Vol. 21 No. 2 (2003), 5-30 (Online).

horrific consequences, with some clearly laying the blame on the doors of elite sugar families in Ormoc, no sustained collective discourse had occurred. Yet it is not only elite families, but also local and national governments and communities themselves that require introspection as a collective process of moving forward. The public horror in the disaster aftermath in 1991 unfortunately did not lead to societal transformation. Yet what is social transformation in a city where economic and political power remains concentrated in an elite few, where government is by practice compromised by elite interests, and where the conditions of vulnerability and poverty for many communities and families are constant realities because intervention programs, including the provision of land through resettlement programs, have continued to fail in eradicating economic and social dependency?

This research has shown several realities. First, elite families had been allowed to insulate themselves from any public discourse of that disaster. The historical processes that allowed these elite families to prosper are the same processes that created economic and social development for the city, and vulnerability and poverty for many communities. This after all is the paradox of development. Yet until now, no accounting of their responsibilities for the disaster had ever been pursued. Second, the government—more so at the local level—continues to be unable to provide the check and balance that would ensure that the developmental paradox is managed and reduced especially for the most vulnerable and poorest communities and families. It remains captive to the interests of the elite few, which sustains the livelihood of both urban and rural communities and as such, are also the interests of these communities. Third, because majority of Ormoc society remain economically dependent on elite families until today, there is no real social transformation from 1991. However, it cannot be overemphasized that elite families are key to the solution, and any initiative in long-term recovery must have their cooperation. Fourth, poverty and vulnerability are inseparable conditions for many communities and families despite numerous intervention programs by non-government and religious organizations. Fifth, the problem of socio-economic dependency among the

poorest and most vulnerable communities and families persist even as they are relocated where new forms of dependency develop. Well-meaning NGOs and religious organizations often supplant (in the case of rural communities that previously depended on elite families for livelihood) or assume (in the case of urban communities) critical economic roles in these communities. Finally, there is a general reluctance among Ormocanons, especially the poorest and most vulnerable communities and families, to dwell on past disasters, explicit in the waning public interest to commemorate the 1991 flood. However, the need to establish a social memory of disasters is vital in community building and long-term recovery.

### **The challenge of accountability**

Political and economic actors in Ormoc City continue to adopt a rhetoric that refuses to recognize the historical bases of disasters. Yet, as this research has shown, the 1991 Ormoc disaster had clear historical precedents. The exploitation of forests in the upland areas of Ormoc primarily for agricultural purposes, a process starting at the turn of the twentieth century, had resulted in an environment with a high susceptibility to flooding downstream to the city. It is true that flooding is a natural phenomenon that occurs fairly frequently. In a geographically and topographically risky area like Ormoc characterized by the regular passage of typhoons, soils with low absorptive capacities, and elevations rising higher than eighteen degrees in many areas, indeed all these undeniably predispose Ormoc to flooding. However, that communities had been allowed to build their homes along the Anilao and Malbasag Rivers, given the high risks already known and accepted as part of the immutable characteristics of the city, is also irrefutable. These communities had nowhere else to go because much of Ormoc had been titled by 1991, primarily by a few land-owning families. While the 1991 flood was one-of-a-kind, a phenomenon that occurs with a 50-year return period, and as such was could not have been prepared for, vulnerability and persistent poverty are not created overnight.

The reality of poverty and vulnerability is accepted as a normal condition for many communities and families, without necessarily asking why

it exists and persists. There is an assumption in the definition of vulnerability itself that the characteristics defining a person or group and their situation are innate, as though they float above space and time. A person is born into poverty and vulnerability, and therefore accepts these conditions as part of his/her self. Catholic teachings further reinforce the notion that one has to accept his/her lot in life and carry his/her own cross. At many levels, therefore, poverty and vulnerability are simply accepted conditions that are not fully resolved. The national and local governments—juggling to balance growth and development—look at these two conditions as problems that require ameliorative solutions. As for elite families, they are not included in the analysis at all. As such, programs that are commonly recommended encompass the construction of infrastructure, resettlement, provision of basic health and employment services, etc. On the other hand, non-government and religious organizations—desiring to fill the gaps in government services—pursue similar programs without undertaking the more crucial analysis of why these conditions continue to afflict communities. It is only the media that had been able to make the link between the economic pursuits of elite families and the resulting vulnerability and poverty of affected communities. Yet the media was unable to sustain its interest in pursuing this link, especially in the face of other urgent and more current political and socio-economic concerns faced by the rest of the country.

In the twenty-two years that passed from 1991, no introspection on the Ormoc disaster had ever been undertaken, a process that would have by necessity identified the root causes of that tragedy. In the minds of many—including the poorest and most vulnerable communities and families themselves—it was nature gone awry. In addition, the inability of Ormoc City to fully respond to the most difficult questions of why twenty-two years of recovery have failed to resolve poverty and vulnerability will have consequences to how it will face future catastrophes. While it will continue to construct flood control infrastructure and resettle communities and families in the aftermath of disasters, it is bound to repeat the tragedies that have taken so many lives and destroyed much hard-earned possessions. Meanwhile,

the poorest and most vulnerable communities and families will continue to be expendable.

On 6 November 2013, the worst typhoon in the history of the Philippines resulted in the deaths of at least 6,300, injuries of at least 28,689, and 1,061 missing.<sup>963</sup> It affected a total of 3,424,593 families in nine regions of the country of which 890,895 families (4,095,280 individuals) were reportedly displaced.<sup>964</sup> It also left total damages amounting to 89,598,068,634.88 pesos.<sup>965</sup> Like Typhoon Uring in 1991 that caused the massive floods in Ormoc, Super Typhoon Yolanda caused the most deaths and damages in Region VIII—Eastern Visayas—specifically Tacloban City. Ninety-three (93) per cent of the total estimated deaths of 6,300 came from Region VIII, mostly due to drowning and trauma. Yet while the bulk of the deaths and destruction was in Tacloban City, Ormoc City was also adversely affected in a seeming case of *déjà vu*. A state of calamity was declared on 11 November 2013 after ninety (90) per cent of Ormoc was devastated by powerful winds and a storm surge that reached 300 meters.<sup>966</sup> In an eerie repeat of the November 1991 disaster, the representative from Ormoc City, a scion of one of Ormoc's elite families—the Torreses—noted about the plight of the city in the aftermath of Super Typhoon Yolanda:

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<sup>963</sup> This is according to the Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), "Final report re effects of Typhoon "Yolanda" (Haiyan)," NDRRMC Update, 06-09 November 2013, 1-65 (Online).

<sup>964</sup> "Updates re the effects of Typhoon 'Yolanda' (Haiyan)," NDRRMC Update dated 14 April 2014, *National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC)* (Online).

<sup>965</sup> The NDRRMC defines these damages as infrastructure damages to transport, including national and provincial/local roads and bridges, seaports and airports, flood control, utilities (water, power, drainage and telecommunications systems), school buildings, health facilities, government buildings, and agricultural and irrigation facilities. Social sectoral damages refer to effects on school buildings and school materials, health structures, and medical supplies and equipment, as well as the dwelling units of affected communities. Damages to the productive sector include agricultural and fisheries, mining and quarrying, trade, industries and services, and tourism. Cross-sectoral damages refer to governance and social impact assessed damages. The last, however, is not defined. See "Final report re effects of Typhoon 'Yolanda' (Haiyan), *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>966</sup> L. Jimenea, "State of calamity in Ormoc City," *Philstar*, 11 November 2013 (Online).

The situation there is very bad...The entire city is devastated. Homes are damaged and it doesn't matter whether they're sturdy. Entire roads are gone, shanties across coastal areas are totally damaged.<sup>967</sup>

She went on to draw parallels with the 1991 Ormoc disaster, but it is notable that the discourse on vulnerability had not changed at all since then, reflecting the fact that members of elite families themselves, specifically those elected to positions of authority, continue to remain oblivious to the differential impacts of hazards:

I was speaking to my sister...She said this is even worse than 1991 in terms of property damage. *In this case, it doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor.* Your house is as badly damaged as the next person (emphasis supplied).<sup>968</sup>

Observations of the aftermath of Super Typhoon Yolanda hark back to the 1991 tragedy, notable in these statements made by Ormoc residents:

Raining started around 4 in the morning of November 8. Then at 6 a.m., we felt the strong wind. But it was around 10 a.m. that we felt the strongest winds. It lasted for one hour. After that it was quiet and the sun shone like nothing had happened.<sup>969</sup>

It looks like a wasteland here with crumpled houses and trees down.<sup>970</sup>

[Around] 5 in the morning [the wind was weak and] we thought there was no typhoon. [But] exactly 6 am, the wind started getting stronger and stronger and the trees started falling and roofs [were] flying everywhere...[Rain] kept coming into the house, I thought it was the end. We tried to stop the water but we can't so we stayed in a corner and just watched everything. It was really scary...[When the typhoon

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<sup>967</sup> Representative Lucy Torres Gomez cited in A. Casauay, "Ormoc still isolated; Gomez appeals for help," in *Rappler*, 10 November 2013 (Online).

<sup>968</sup> Ibid.

<sup>969</sup> Elizabeth cited in "People of Ormoc cope with Yolanda's aftermath," *World Vision*, accessed 5 January 2016 (Online).

<sup>970</sup> Jed Cortes cited in "Yolanda survivors recount onslaught, fury of the storm," *Rappler*, 9 November 2013 (Online).

had passed] everybody came out, looked around, and everything was devastated, and I thought that was the end for my son and myself, and of course my family. I was so scared.<sup>971</sup>

Supertyphoon Yolanda is beyond the scope of this research, but it is mentioned here to emphasize the persistent lack of inherent introspection, not only among the elite and those occupying positions of power and authority not only about vulnerability, but also of the general public. More importantly, among local and regional government officials, the elimination of vulnerability has not been a policy for longer-term disaster management. The prevalent mindframe among these officials had been to look at these incidents as ‘natural,’ borne of environmental causes that are beyond human control or knowledge. As it is today, the effects of disasters are still primarily managed through technical solutions. In Ormoc immediately after 1991, reconstruction of damaged bridges and dikes was undertaken. A massive flood control and mitigation project was pursued through a grant aid from Japan in 1995,<sup>972</sup> which paved the way for re-aligning the Anilao and Malbasag rivers to “confine the flood discharge of a fifty-year return period.” The program also meant the construction of slit dams and the reconstruction of bridges designed to prevent the clogging of floating logs and to fit into the new river alignment.<sup>973</sup> Indeed, these infrastructural programs had been hailed as effective countermeasures against the recurrence of the deadly 1991 floods. A major test for the structures had been the waters brought about by the similarly severe tropical storm Gilas (international codename Koni) in 2003, which the Ormoc City Engineering Office touted as not resulting in any flooding. However, though the effects of Typhoon Gilas were not as destructive as Typhoon Uring in 1991, it still left Ormoc flooded.<sup>974</sup> Floods were reportedly breast-deep in Uwak (Barangay San Isidro) and

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<sup>971</sup> Grace cited in M. Santos, “After ‘Yolanda,’ American expat remains positive about Ormoc City,” *Inquirer.net*, 13 November 2013 (Online).

<sup>972</sup> Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Department of Public Works and Highways, *Basic Design Study Report on Flood Mitigation Project in Ormoc City* (CTI Engineering Co., Ltd. And Central Consultants Co., Ltd., March 1997).

<sup>973</sup> I. Antonio, “Community commitment for sustained efficiency of infrastructures: Ormoc City, Philippines.”

<sup>974</sup> A. Abarcar (June-August 2003), “Typhoon Gilas Flooded Ormoc,” *The Observer* 1:1. Leyte Institute of Technology-Ormoc City School of Arts and Trades, 17.

knee-deep in Barangay Toog, while Barangays Alegria, Punta, Linao and Naungan were similarly flooded. But technical solutions such as these are limited, and do not eliminate the root causes of disaster. While technical solutions to disaster are indeed the most visible assurance to the public of a government that is working to respond to future threats, they provide at best a false sense of security and invincibility. Indeed, the devastation wrought by Supertyphoon Yolanda in 2013 is testament to the weakness of primarily depending on the infallibility of infrastructures as a solution to disasters. Faced by strong winds and a storm surge—hazards that had not originally been foreseen as threats to the city—expensive infrastructure had been a useless barrier against the devastation of private and public properties.

### **Vulnerability and disaster**

The same historical processes that predisposed societies to disasters also created vulnerability. While all Ormoc residents in 1991 had suffered death and destruction to varying degrees regardless of socio-economic status, the economic burden was highest for the poorest families living along the riverbanks. Yet while all poor families who had been direct victims of the flash flood equally suffered economic and physical losses, a smaller sub-set of families were reduced to more precarious situations than other poor families. Indeed, the poor cannot be seen as a homogeneous group. Urban poor families crowding on strips of public land along the riverbanks of the Anilao and Malbasag, for example, were economically better off than sugarcane worker families even before the flood, although both these groups were subsistence families who depended entirely on their manual labor. Urban poor families had enjoyed better access to information and resources due to their proximity to the city. They were also the direct recipients of resources made available immediately after the flood by local and barangay officials, NGOs and other donors, as they were the most visible victims. In comparison, sugarcane worker families fared worse because their areas were harder to reach by relief groups, information about assistance was scarce as it had to be filtered through the *agalon*—the landowner, the boss, the father figure—who had to approve of such interventions, and haciendas typically had poorer infrastructure such as roads even before the flood,



thereby rendering aid programs extremely difficult. Sugarcane worker families were the 'hidden' faces of suffering before and during the 1991 disaster in Ormoc. As such, the flood only exacerbated the gap between the urban poor and the sugarcane workers. But the worse tragedy is that sugarcane worker families continue to be among the most vulnerable and marginalized in Ormoc society, especially those who persisted in the hacienda of Barangay Nalunopan after 1991.

Poverty, as the case of the 1991 Ormoc flood had showed, is not similar to or synonymous with vulnerability. The deeper nuance in the concept of vulnerability compared with poverty in disaster discourse provided a magnifying lens through which disaster impacts can be better understood in disaster relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Thus, while poverty determines vulnerability, poor families do not experience vulnerability at similar levels. Within urban poor communities, women-headed households were particularly vulnerable because informal job opportunities in and around the city after the flood were more numerous for men than women. In addition, women were more socially oriented than men to care for families, which curtailed the time and opportunity to seek alternative livelihoods outside the home. However, such a constraint was not necessarily true for women-headed households in sugarcane worker communities where manual labor did not discriminate based on sex. Women were employed on a daily wage, similar to men, regardless of age. Meanwhile, urban poor and sugarcane worker households alike, with elderly, disabled and small children, had to deal with additional economic burdens of healthcare that were not immediately available after a disaster, adding a layer of vulnerability to their life situations.

Vulnerability in poverty-stricken communities is thus best understood as a continuum, determined by the unique characteristics that make up a household. At one end of the spectrum are households that, by virtue of possessing personal and socio-economic characteristics that provide them with a bundle of security nets against crises, are better able to cope with those crises. At the other end of the spectrum are those households that do not have similar security nets, and are thus far more easily affected

economically, psychologically and materially. In between these two spectrums are all the other households that make up a community. The characteristics that influence vulnerability include the age of a household's members at the time of a hazard event, the location of their residence, occupation, educational attainment, sex, level of savings, number of children, and whether the members of the household are able to immediately access external help.<sup>975</sup>

Vulnerability, viewed as a continuum, is also not static, as households are theoretically able to move out of vulnerable life situations through various means. At the personal level, they can physically transfer to safer locations, build stronger houses, and generally pursue activities that increase their resilience and lessen their vulnerability to disaster effects. At the community level, barangay and local governments can spearhead initiatives designed both to prevent disasters and to mitigate them. These initiatives include increasing campaigns for disaster awareness and preparedness, strengthening infrastructure development through the construction of better designed dams, bridges and roads, and allotting an appropriate budget for disaster relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation. However, the issue of overreliance on technical solutions to disaster, a common but short-sighted approach of governments, will be discussed in more depth later, but it bears noting here that to look at disasters as natural often leads to policies that merely attempt to predict the hazard and modify its impact,<sup>976</sup> without necessarily changing the underlying source of systemic vulnerability. Such policies, including those that ostensibly manage the effects of future natural hazards such as the construction of better designed dams and breakwaters, generate a deeper level of marginalization, as communities are disrupted once again for relocation to areas far from their sources of livelihoods. More disturbingly, issues of land rights and land grabbing had been observed in the aftermath of recent disasters in the Philippines, often in the guise of

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<sup>975</sup> B. Wisner, P. Blaikie, T. Cannon and I. Davis, *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, 11-13.

<sup>976</sup> T. Cannon, "Vulnerability analysis and the explanation of 'natural' disasters," in *Disasters, Development and Environment*, ed. A. Varley (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto and Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), 13.

disaster reconstruction programs spearheaded by the government.<sup>977</sup> In 1991, the flood in Ormoc resulted in the clearing of riverbanks of illegal settlers and as such, led to an easier implementation by the local government of the easement policy in rivers. Clearly, government program or policy is never politically and socio-economically neutral.<sup>978</sup>

Nonetheless, while vulnerability is theoretically an elastic concept, which accounts for families being able to move in and out of socio-economically precarious situations after a relevant program of intervention, in reality it is a more permanent situation for many families. Emphasis must be given to the case of sugarcane worker families in Barangay Nalunopan (discussed in **Chapter 7**), which showed that they remained the most destitute even after twenty years from November 1991, in comparison with the urban poor disaster survivors. The reasons for the persistence of vulnerability and poverty in these areas are necessarily complex, but at its core is the weak role of government.

The hand of government within haciendas in the Philippines is historically limited. In the barangay hacienda of Nalunopan, for instance, the government did construct one of the Japanese-designed and funded slit dams that benefited the entire city downstream. But roads, bridges and other infrastructure within the barangay remain non-existent, as these were costs that must accrue to the hacienda owner. While it is beyond the scope of this research to assess the impact of the highly touted developmental program called 4Ps (*Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* or Bridging Program for the Filipino Family)<sup>979</sup> of the Department of Social Welfare and Development

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<sup>977</sup> See, for instance, "Understanding land grabbing, land rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> century," in particular M.A. Manahan, "When disasters clear the land: Narratives of post-Yolanda land contestations," in *Focus on the Global South Policy Review* Vol 1 No 6, ed. M.A. Manahan and C. Militante (Diliman, Quezon City: Focus on the Global South Philippines, January-June 2015). ISSN 2094-7089, 10-16 (Online). Also M.A. Uson, "Grabbing the 'Clean Slate': The politics of the intersection of land grabbing, disasters and climate change—insights from a local Philippine community in the aftermath of super typhoon Haiyan," ISS Working Paper Series/General Series Vol. 603 (The Hague, The Netherlands: International Institute of Social Studies, February 2015), 1-50. ISSN 0921-0210 (Online).

<sup>978</sup> Cannon, "Vulnerability analysis and the explanation of 'natural' disasters," 14.

<sup>979</sup> The 4Ps was launched in 2008 and implemented by the DSWD. It is patterned after the conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs in Latin America and African countries. Developmental partners include the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank, and bilateral partners such as the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). It

(DSWD) in rural and urban areas of the country, including in haciendas in Ormoc, it is notable that several sugarcane worker survivor families in Nalunopan profess not to have yet been enrolled in the program. The 4Ps is a conditional cash transfer program that aims to eradicate extreme poverty by directly investing in health and education, particularly in children aged zero to fourteen years.<sup>980</sup> The failure of some of the poorest families in Barangay Nalunopan to enrol in the 4Ps precludes the opportunity for their children to receive government support to enable them to continue their primary schooling. Yet some families were indeed not enrolled because they did not remain in one location inside the hacienda and did not reside permanently in one area. It was also these families whose children were not continuously in school, who would rather work as day laborers in the hacienda, and who often married young.

The most glaring weakness in Nalunopan of course remains the government's continued inability to impose the minimum wage for manual labor. Day laborers were paid the minimum of seventy pesos per day, without other social security benefits like the universal Social Security System (SSS) or PhilHealth. For the most vulnerable households, like sugarcane workers, the inability to earn the minimum wage per day forces them to supplement their income with other sources, such as selling backyard produce or doing odd jobs around the city. The real challenge occurs when the breadwinner in the household becomes sick and is unable to earn his daily wage. In the hacienda, if a laborer becomes sick, he gets no wage and there are also no social security nets for him or his family. Yet, sugarcane worker families in Nalunopan were remarkably offhand about their

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aims to target 4.3 million poor households by 2016. Approximately 120 billion pesos have been allocated to date, with approximately 3,086,427 beneficiaries in 1,400 cities and municipalities in 79 provinces in all 17 regions nationwide.

<sup>980</sup> For a discussion on research on the impact of the 4Ps on school enrollment, see N. Chaudhury and Y. Okamura, "Conditional cash transfers and school enrollment: Impact of the conditional cash transfer program in the Philippines," in *Philippine Social Protection Note No. 6* (World Bank Group and Australian Aid, July 2012) (Online). Reyes and Tabuga note targeting concerns, whereby 171,947 households (or 7.5% of total 2.3 million household beneficiaries that had been served by the program so far) had been delisted because they were found to be non-poor and non-compliant. For Reyes and Tabuga, this indicates leakages in the program. C. Reyes and A. Tabuga, "Conditional cash transfer program in the Philippines: Is it reaching the extremely poor?" *Discussion Paper Series No. 2012-42* (Makati City: Philippine Institute for Development Studies, December 2012) (Online).

health. The lack of economic resources results in these families depending on 'herbal' remedies for common illnesses, with most not seeing a medical practitioner for most of their lives. Health is a luxury that these families could scarce afford. At the same time, their attitude towards death is fatalistic, practical and no-nonsense. Everybody dies one way or another, and to die when one was old did not make so much difference as when one died when one was young. There were stories of sugarcane workers in Nalunopan who contracted serious illnesses, but were never treated in any hospital setting. A woman worker, for example, may have suffered what could have been cancer based on the symptoms described, but she was never brought to the doctor and she died in her own house after a few years with only herbs to help her manage her pain. Yet her family took care of her the best they could for the few years prior to her death.

As the case of the 1991 Ormoc disaster shows, the delineation between poverty and vulnerability is counterproductive in the longer-term process of recovery. Poverty is indeed different from vulnerability. But the poorest families will always be the most vulnerable, and vice versa. Sugarcane laborer families, considered as among the poorest sectors in the country, remain the most at risk from disasters, whether they reside and work in the hacienda or move to new locations, and even after intervention programs such as resettlement to new locales. Yet, they continue to be 'hidden' despite this reality.

It is not surprising that though poverty and vulnerability are persistently higher in rural than urban areas in the Philippines, public interest is more focused on urban affairs. Death and destruction in cities always command more intense attention and concern than those that occur in rural locations.

In the Philippines where the media is often perceived as a more credible source of information than the government, the public's understanding of events is largely influenced by what people see on the news. In the case of the Ormoc 1991 flood, national media outfits circulated numerous images of the massive and utter destruction in the city center that

quickly created the disaster discourse. These images focused on the urban squatters as the face of the Ormoc tragedy. On the other hand, sugarcane worker families who were also devastated by the floods, residing almost in isolation in rural upland areas, did not capture public attention. Perceived as temporary or seasonal migrant workers from different parts of Leyte and working anonymously in haciendas all over Ormoc, never mind that majority of them had resided in the haciendas for at least ten years, they were considered outsiders even prior to the flood event. In the eyes of the local government, burdened as it was by competing demands on its finite resources, it was rational in the aftermath of the 1991 tragedy to shift the responsibility of hacienda workers back to the *agalon*, who was after all the only source of these workers' economic and social wellbeing. If not for Catholic church groups that had persisted in their active interest in the plight of sugarcane worker families since the 1970s, these marginalized groups would have completely fallen through the cracks of economic neglect. Similarly, other hinterland groups around Leyte island and Negros province that had also been adversely affected by Typhoon Uring in 1991 did not invite the same level of media attention as the small community in Ormoc City called Isla Verde that was completely wiped out by the flash flood. Consequently, aid was not as numerous in these areas unidentified by the media, as compared with those that had received consistent public attention.

Ormoc in 2013, twenty-two years after 1991, is a bustling city. It boasts of major thoroughfares with popular fast food chains such as Jollibee, Andok's, McDonald's and Greenwich competing with local restaurants. There were Gaisano malls in two separate but prime locations, several large and small grocery stores, banks, universities, schools and small entrepreneurial shops. Everywhere there were signs of socio-economic progress. Only a small sculpture existed that served as memorial to the 6,000 or so victims of the Ormoc flood in 1991, but that one was found in the cemetery grounds far from the city center. In many ways, it appeared that the 1991 tragedy was forgotten in the collective consciousness of Ormoc.

Natural hazards that quickly unravel into a deeper social problem very often result in some form of social change.<sup>981</sup> The effects of a hazard on the social, political and economic aspects of a society represent a break from “business as usual,” which is especially true for hazards that occur suddenly and on a massive scale. These events are thus opportunities to right past wrongs through the formulation and implementation of policies with better consideration of the built and natural environment. At the collective level, the lives of poor families in Ormoc after 1991 had indeed changed after the deluge of assistance that the city received. For many, especially those in the city center, relocation to ‘safer’ areas, facilitated both by local and national governments as well as by NGOs, provided them with a jumpstart to new lives. Of course who determined what ‘safer’ areas were was a political decision, certainly a decision often based on expediency to a short term problem of providing a solution to the issue of homelessness rather than as a long term solution of eliminating vulnerability among the most marginalized groups. Recipient families agreed to be relocated because of the promise of free housing, never mind that the area set aside for the purpose was not necessarily safer or less risky than the riverbanks where they originally came from. Barangay Tambulid, the site for the local government’s resettlement program in 1993, was in fact an area also historically prone to flooding. Nonetheless, relocation often solved the problem of repeated vulnerability because, at the short term, it created an opportunity for the poorest families to leave high-risk areas and rebuild new lives elsewhere.

Yet natural hazards such as typhoons, floods and landslides are ‘normal’ occurrences in the Philippines where geographic location and its topographic character regularly influence the lives of communities. As such, resettled families continue to contend with the effects of new hazards even in their new living areas. The question is how these families are able to cope with new threats to their fragile livelihoods brought about by new hazards when they are only just starting to recover from the effects of a previous

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<sup>981</sup> See H. Vollmer, *The Sociology of Disruption, Disaster and Social Change, Punctuated Cooperation* (Cambridge University Press; A. Prelog, 2010). Vollmer, in particular, defines disruption in a tautological sense: “as any actual occasion which at least one participant marks as being disruptive” (42) in an attempt to “frame” it within the context of everyday life.

hazard. Indeed, a scholar had argued that, in the case of Guatemala, for example, a history of political violence and injustice contributed to the existence of ‘permanent disaster’ among the poorest segments of its society.<sup>982</sup> For Ormoc, a history that privileged environmental exploitation for the sake of economic growth and development, coupled with the unique realities of geography and topography, have resulted in the creation of ‘permanent disaster’ for the poorest families. Disaster for these families is experienced not as a single event, but as a sustained series of threats to livelihoods and meager incomes.

Non-government organizations undoubtedly undertake important work in areas that the national and local governments are unable to do so, especially in disaster aftermath. In Barangay Tambulilid, for example, where the civil society organization Gawad Kalinga (GK) had adopted several of the poorest urban poor communities (discussed in **Chapter 6**), including resettled survivor families, majority of the houses provided to beneficiaries in the past was destroyed after Super typhoon Yolanda struck Ormoc City in November 2013. Recipient families were rendered homeless yet again. An Ormoc-based GK worker, who had been a 1991 flood survivor himself, noted in the aftermath of Super Typhoon Yolanda:

We did not know where help would come from, but we knew God would not let us down.<sup>983</sup>

Alluding to the 1991 Ormoc tragedy, he added, “It is like we are brought together and made even stronger by storms.”<sup>984</sup>

It is fortunate that the GK communities in Barangay Tambulilid, like other GK projects all over the Philippines, are linked together with external networks of volunteers and donors, which provided the much-needed support for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Gandang Kalikasan, Inc., a social enterprise established by the daughters of Gawad Kalinga founder

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<sup>982</sup> R. Plant in Wisner et al (2004), 9.

<sup>983</sup> Buboy Igot cited in T. Castillo, “Thank you, Tambulilid,” in *Human Nature*, accessed 19 January 2015 (Online).

<sup>984</sup> Ibid.



Antonio Meloto<sup>985</sup> in 2008 and selling organic personal care products, funded the rehabilitation of the GK communities in Barangay Tambulilid, with more than 100 houses constructed immediately after the devastation of Super Typhoon Yolanda. The GK itself had been touted as “an innovative approach that could be the key to solving poverty and homelessness in the Philippines.”<sup>986</sup> It was in fact its aggressive “grassroots approach” of mobilizing volunteers, alongside family recipients, and tapping local governments and donors for logistical and financial support that made it so popular in the country and abroad. In the process, GK was honored with several awards since it first began to operate as an offshoot of the popular Catholic lay community called Couples for Christ in the early 2000s. Indeed, without the power of a public who believed in GK’s programs, comprised of both individuals and organizations in the Philippines and abroad who continually support its work through volunteerism and donations, there would be no chance at all for any kind of sustainable community building for any of the affected families in its adopted communities all over the Philippines, including the GK villages in Barangay Tambulilid. Community resilience in GK communities is undoubtedly strongly dependent on external support, without which these communities will wither. However, because Gawad Kalinga has prioritized collaboration with the government and as a result has followed a strategy of silence over political issues in order to protect its generally harmonious relationship (otherwise how could it accept donations of land from the government?), it has done a great disservice to the Ormoc people. By choosing alliance with the government above all else, it condones social injustice by its refusal to recognize the inherent flaws and shortcomings of government actions and the lessons of history in relation to elite families.

This failure, however, is not solely for Gawad Kalinga. Again, while the work that Catholic priests and nuns in disaster response is crucial, they had

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<sup>985</sup> *Gandang Kalikasan, Inc.* was established by Anna Meloto-Wilk, Dylan Wilk, and Camille Meloto. See L. Cristobal, “Entrepreneur Anna Meloto-Wilk on women and the business of changing the world,” *GMA News Online*, 15 March 2015 (Online).

<sup>986</sup> R. Habaradas and M. L. Aquino, “Towards innovative, livable, and prosperous Asian megacities, Gawad Kalinga: Innovation in the city (and beyond),” *AKI Working Paper No. 10-01C* (Manila: Angelo King Institute, De La Salle University, August 2010).

been unable to promote public debate within their own communities about the real causes of the continuing persistence of poverty and vulnerability. A difficult issue to deal with, the Catholic church instead preferred to focus on providing care to the poorest and most vulnerable communities and families. In the Saint Philippine Duchesne Ormoc Workers Foundation, Inc. (SPDOWFI), the community established by the intrepid nuns of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ) in Barangay Luna among former sugar hacienda worker families, the disaster in 2013 led one nun to observe:

In our community, there were houses standing, but roofs had all been blown away, including the roof of our center, day care center and chapel...It was a pitiful sight, I wanted to cry, but the people were so happy to see that I made it there. So I told them I would get there by hook or by crook.”<sup>987</sup>

Another priest noted:

We want to respond right away to the need for food in remote areas because *government and other agencies are focused on the Tacloban area*. Some of the people had not eaten for days...Many people are depressed and fearful and we are thinking of how we can help them with that (emphasis supplied).<sup>988</sup>

Incidentally, SPDOWFI celebrated its twentieth anniversary on 18 November 2013, just a few days after the devastation of Super typhoon Yolanda. According to the RSCJ, “[n]ow, more than ever, the community feels the need to come together in *shared suffering*, but also combined hope and trust in the God who saves” (emphasis supplied).<sup>989</sup> Like Gawad Kalinga, the SPDOWFI continues to be a viable community because of valuable support from the nuns. It remains to be seen, however, whether the planned turnover of the community to its residents and the eventual retreat of the RSCJ from community decision-making will stimulate grassroots

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<sup>987</sup> Sr. Sandra Clemente, RSCJ, cited in N.J. Viehland, *Ibid*.

<sup>988</sup> Carmelite Father Ernesto Ombrog III cited in N.J. Viehland, “Religious orders in Philippines rush to help typhoon victims,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 15 November 2013 (Online).

<sup>989</sup> Sr. Joy Luz, RSCJ, “Update: November 14, 2013, in *News from the Philippines, Network of Sacred Heart Schools* (Online).

initiative. In both the cases of the GK communities in Barangay Tambulilid and the SPDOWFI in Barangay Luna, stimulus for collective resilience and community building came from outside sources, even after more than twenty years from the 1991 tragedy. These two cases show that external support from non-government organizations and other groups is crucial in ensuring the sustainability of resettled communities. At least with these two cases, it is clear that the communities in general have remained dependent on external support. In the case of the GK villages in Tambulilid, Gawad Kalinga provided continuous logistical and moral support as there is a permanent GK structure within the community through which GK volunteers and workers regularly interacted with community members. In SPDOWFI, Sister Iraida Sua-an, RSCJ, had continuously resided in a house built in the heart of the community and funded by the RSCJ Mother House, providing a stabilizing presence and vital leadership over community affairs. Nonetheless, it is clear that the process of community building adopted in GK and SPDOWFI—controlled and directed by external actors—assume that these communities are inherently fragile, weak and, therefore, unable to stand on their own devices. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the plight of Barangay Nalunopan (discussed in **Chapter 7**) after Supertyphoon Yolanda in 2013. At least until October 2013, a month before the devastation occurred due to Supertyphoon Yolanda, the community that remained there reported they experienced continued vulnerability after the 1991 Ormoc flood, with sugarcane worker survivors noting that their lives had not substantially changed since then.

Yet, why was it that given similar types of assistance through rehabilitation programs designed to help disaster survivors get back on their feet, some families are simply not able to do so? What accounts for families being able to cope from the effects of disaster and those who could not? Indeed, why does vulnerability persist for some families and not for others, even after similar programs of intervention for relief and rehabilitation? The answer is that, based on the cases discussed in previous chapters, the combination of personal circumstances and the lack of strong social safety nets available to poor families in disaster aftermath, especially ready sources

of low-interest credit, result in economic uncertainty, deepening the already alarming situation for many families. Ormoc City, like the rest of the country, is characterized by a self-help socio-economic environment that privileges profit. Credit options are thus often closed to poor households, who have nothing to offer as collateral. In communities with established external support systems in disaster aftermath, the poorest families are able to utilize resources—both material and financial—that may not be readily available at ‘normal’ times because access is facilitated by non-government organizations. In such adopted communities as GK villages and the SPDOWFI, for example, where benefactors are ever present, there is no need to compete for scarce resources. Such a situation is most visible in GK communities, as the organization is able to quickly mobilize volunteers and donations in disaster aftermath, and as such to emphasize the organization’s culture of ‘bayanihan’ or communitarian unity and cooperation even in the midst of chaos brought about by a natural hazard. One GK village survivor captures this sense succinctly after the Yolanda tragedy of 2013:

The GK motto “Walang Iwanan” (leave no one behind) became real to us. Because had it not been for the values of Gawad Kalinga, it would have been every man for himself.<sup>990</sup>

Thus, coping in disaster aftermath is taught as a collective project, where the value of ‘bayanihan’ is emphasized among beneficiary households, thereby shifting the focus of coping and resilience from personal interests, a common mindset of the urban poor, to community interest. To a lesser extent, SPDOWFI—vastly under-resourced in comparison with Gawad Kalinga—is also able to link the community with outside organizations and individuals who could provide valuable material and financial assistance in disaster aftermath. Communities without such established institutional support are obviously at a marked disadvantage because members can only rely on individual resources and initiatives to cope with the effects of massive tragedies.

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<sup>990</sup> Santiago Penaso cited in G. Luga, “Ormoc: Rising above tragedy, over and over again,” *Gawad Kalinga*, 8 April 2014 (Online).

Unique circumstances also explain the persistence of vulnerability in several cases of families observed in this research. The range of personal tragedies that poor families experience is vast—illnesses brought about by lifelong poor health and hygiene, deaths and disabilities resulting from pursuits of risky livelihoods, early marriages of teenage daughters and sons, unplanned pregnancies, drug addiction, alcoholism, smoking, and gambling, among a few. All these life events greatly affect a family's ability to not only adequately recover from natural hazards that regularly occur, but also systematically curtail opportunities to pursue uninterrupted productive lives.

The lives of the poor are undoubtedly played out as a series of minor disasters that, over time, result in the creation and subsequent deepening of vulnerability. Once a natural hazard occurs, it wipes out all the incremental gains the family had achieved thus far, and plunges the household in further economic and social despair, which takes years to achieve pre-hazard levels. Thus, while it is possible for a household to cope with a new 'normal' in the months following a hazard through the erection of a new house somewhere safer and making the most of the material and financial donations, resources are logically diverted to the satisfaction of ever basic needs—food, potable water, health, housing, etc., with savings becoming virtually impossible. It is a dismal cycle of poverty and vulnerability. It is also undeniable that an intervention is required to cut the cycle, and it is precisely this role of government that is vital in disaster aftermath. NGOs and other groups fill the gaps in government action by focusing on the marginalized sectors.

### **Vulnerability in disaster aftermath**

Vulnerability in disaster research is defined as the

*...characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (an extreme natural event or process). It involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone's life, livelihood, property or other assets are put at risk by a*

discrete and identifiable event (or series or 'cascade' of such events) in nature and in society (original emphasis).<sup>991</sup>

The above definition is markedly simpler and more direct than a previous description used in an earlier edition of Blaikie et al (1994), wherein an attempt is made to delineate social vulnerability from susceptibility of the built environment. Social vulnerability is the

...characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard. It involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone's life or livelihood are put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event in nature or in society."<sup>992</sup>

The transition from the latter definition to the former bears noting because of the emphasis on people's situations, implying the transitory nature of vulnerability. The inherent negative character of vulnerability, which assumes a passive and weak perspective to those who are seen primarily as victims of natural hazards, precludes a creative and realistic approach to individual and community survivors in disaster aftermath. By focusing on people's situations, the vulnerability approach concedes that people are vulnerable based on their particular circumstances. The situations that people find themselves in contribute to their vulnerability, and thus may be a temporary condition. Several points are also relevant in both definitions:

- Attributes *within* societies are different. Thus, vulnerable individuals and groups exist in an otherwise resilient society;
- The entire disaster management cycle—Prevention and Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery—is encompassed in the determination of vulnerability;

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<sup>991</sup> B. Wisner et al (2004), *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London and New York: Routledge, 11.

<sup>992</sup> P. Blaikie, T. Cannon, I. Davis and T. Wisner, *At Risk, Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters* (London, UK: Routledge, 1994).

- Everyone has *some* level of capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from a hazard. Thus, vulnerability is “a matter of degree, and not an absolute quality;”<sup>993</sup>
- Vulnerability is a result of a combination of several factors;
- Livelihoods and other assets are at risk in disaster aftermath, not just life. As such, “fatalities” is not the single dominant measure of disaster impact;<sup>994</sup> and
- The recognition that an event may not only be a one-time occurrence, but a series—and indeed a cascade—of incidents reflects the reality for the poorest families in a society.

The notion that vulnerability is temporary presents a positive and proactive approach to a problem that is primarily seen as a governance issue. By focusing on people’s situations, the implicit assumption is that a targeted intervention is possible, indeed required, to move them out of vulnerable situations.

Closely linked to the concept of vulnerability as a governance issue is the notion of risk. At the individual level, vulnerability has been traditionally conceptualized as risk, with consideration to the following core issues: To what extent is an individual exposed to a specific hazard? What is the probability he/she will be adversely affected? Why is an individual particularly vulnerable to that hazard? What are the proper indicators to measure his/her vulnerability? What can be done to avoid his/her risk due to this hazard? These questions are central to traditional risk assessment, expressed in the following formula:

$$\text{Risk} = \text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}^{995}$$

The above pseudo-equation is advocated by Blaikie et al (2004), and is relevant in the use of the Pressure and Release model (PAR) that the book recommends to show how disasters occur when natural hazards affect

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<sup>993</sup> C. Bara. “Factsheet, Social Vulnerability to Disasters,” *CRN Report* commissioned by the Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP). Crisis and Risk Network (CRN) and Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zürich, November 2010.

<sup>994</sup> Ibid.

<sup>995</sup> Wisner et al, *At Risk*, 49.

vulnerable populations. Traditional risk assessment, however, is usually limited to the identification of dangers, defined as the probability of occurrence and likely damage, expressed in the following equation:

$$\text{Risk} = \text{Probability} \times \text{impact (Damage)}^{996}$$

In the above equation, risk is measured by the probability of the hazard occurrence multiplied by the perceived effects or damage resulting from the hazard, in terms of life, property and other considerations such as future incomes. Vulnerability is hidden in the 'impact' dimension of the risk because the calculation of impact or damages is based on the unique combinations of personal characteristics, such as age, sex, family background, education, etc. Nonetheless, vulnerability in the above equation is not disaggregated to account for very different impacts within society.<sup>997</sup> Studies, for example, have shown that the risk of drowning was higher for women during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami than for men in many villages in Indonesia.<sup>998</sup> The socially differentiated risks to drowning of more women during floods had been observed to be due to cultural and social factors that restrict mobility, limit education and training, prescribe responsibilities for the care of children and elderly, and undertaking occupations that increase risk.<sup>999</sup> The calculation of risk of course assumes that individuals are able to correctly identify the probability of an adverse effect and as such take rational steps to choose to avoid those risks. Indeed, the conceptualization of risk assumes that individuals (and groups) have a level of choice on whether to further engage in behaviors that may be characterized as risk taking or risk avoiding. However, in many cases where the sources of vulnerability are socio-economic and political inequalities, choice becomes irrelevant. The decision to relocate to less risky areas, for example, is influenced by financial

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<sup>996</sup> C. Bara (2010), 6.

<sup>997</sup> Ibid.

<sup>998</sup> Oxfam (2005) cited in M. Ahern and S. Kovats, "The health impacts of floods," in *Flood Hazards and Health, Responding to Present and Future Risks*, ed. R. Few and F. Matthies (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2006), 35.

<sup>999</sup> Briceño (2001) and Cannon (2002) cited in M. Ahern and S. Kovats, Ibid., 34-35.



(Is it affordable?), cultural (Is it appropriate?), and political considerations (Is it secure?).<sup>1000</sup>

Human agency remains a key factor in vulnerability discourses because survivors themselves, including the most vulnerable families, actively and consciously make decisions prior to, during and after a disaster. Wisner et al (2004) differentiate between “individually generated access to safety (self-protection)” (in contradistinction to individually generated vulnerability) and other aspects of safety, which include social protection.<sup>1001</sup> Individually generated safety includes actions such as strengthening houses, locating on land considered safe from floods, and using drought-resistant seeds during farming, among others. Social protection encompasses both non-monetary social relations and the provision by the government and other institutional organizations of preventive measures.<sup>1002</sup> In the cases discussed in previous chapters, survivor families maximize self-protection and social protection when these clearly benefit them. However, self-protection often entails extra cost, e.g. reinforcing housing structures to ensure the non-recurrence of flooding, which some families cannot afford. In such cases, social protection or social capital, or the ways that families are able to tap the community, NGOs, the government and other groups, bridges the shortage in their own self-protection initiatives. It is notable, for example, that in Barangay Nalunopan, those areas that had claimed many lives had been re-populated by some families that survived the 1991 flood and chose not to relocate outside the hacienda barangay. A typical Barangay Nalunopan family’s decision to persist in areas that had been previously flooded was based on several factors: proximity to the sugarcane fields where family members work, proximity to immediate family and friends in particular and the community in general, and accessibility to the entrance and exit of the barangay. Proximity to the community becomes a source of social protection, especially in situations where external sources of assistance, such as NGOs, are non-existent, as in the case of Barangay Nalunopan. In communities where NGOs are active, however, these NGOs provide valuable social

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<sup>1000</sup> C. Bara, *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>1001</sup> Wisner et al (2004), *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>1002</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

protection for the community as a whole through external linkages and networks.

In general, local and national government agencies fail to identify the needs of the most vulnerable groups in a community in the planning of local response and relief organization.<sup>1003</sup> The reasons cited for this failure include local authorities commonly being understaffed, underfunded and stretched thin during emergencies, while state authorities lack the systems in place to allocate resources as needed.<sup>1004</sup> As such, tools for identifying vulnerable populations are increasingly recognized in developed countries such as the United States as vital for emergency response planning. Social vulnerability indices (SVI) are one such tool increasingly advocated for use by government agencies to identify the location of the most vulnerable populations in a society, using the following factors:

- Socioeconomic variables such as poverty, employment and education;
- Household composition/disability comprising age, parenting (whether single parenting) and disability variables;
- Minority status/language comprising race, ethnicity;
- Housing and transportation comprising housing structure, crowding and vehicle access variable.<sup>1005</sup>

Local governments and locally based non-governmental organizations are logically the most knowledgeable about their communities. However, the conduct of SVIs entails organizational costs, which many governments and agencies cannot cover due to financial constraints. In post-1991 Ormoc City, the local government did not have programs that specifically targeted the identification and mitigation of vulnerable populations, separate from the generally poor communities. Local government officials were generally aware of where the poorest communities lived, but were not knowledgeable about the general wellbeing of these

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<sup>1003</sup> B. Flanagan, E. Gregory, E. Hallisey, J. Heitgerd and B. Lewis, "A social vulnerability index for disaster management," *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 8:1, Article 3 (2011), 3 (Online).

<sup>1004</sup> APHA 2006 and USGAO 2006 cited in B. Flanagan et al, Ibid.

<sup>1005</sup> Ibid., 4-6.

individual families due to a lack of programs that specifically targeted them. It was notable that only in the Gawad Kalinga and SPDOWFI villages were vulnerable families individually identified, but this was due to the fact that the communities were spatially defined in terms of area of residence and the communities were smaller in number. As such, it was easier to get to know the specific circumstances of each family and to provide targeted intervention programs that aim to mitigate these dire circumstances. However, in the general Ormoc society where the urban and rural poor reside, such as in the sugarcane haciendas and the pockets of illegal and temporary settler communities around the city center, including Barangay Tambulilid, families often live without particular notice by the officials and agencies of the local government. For many of these urban and rural poor Ormocanons, the face of government is the barangay social and/or health worker, who administer and implement crucial and basic health and education services for their children through various barangay programs. For the most part of their lives, these households are left to survive on their own initiatives and devices.

### **Social memory of disaster**

Major disasters in many societies evolve to become critical markers of social identity. In many instances, the shared experience of a massive tragedy brought about by a natural hazard results in the creation of a sense of solidarity and community especially in its immediate aftermath. In the case of Ormoc City, survivors of the 1991 flood, particularly those possessing the evidence of an 'uwat' (scar), delineated the 'pure' from the 'migrant' residents. Nonetheless, the memorialization of the flood tragedy in Ormoc had not been sustained until the present times, ostensibly due to the waning interest of the people themselves. In the years after 1991, the local government had allowed a day of mourning in observance of 5 November 1991. Proclamation No. 92, signed by then President Fidel Ramos, marked the first year death anniversary as a special non-working day and a day of mourning as "a reminder that this tragic event would not have happened if our forests had been accorded due protection." Proclamation Nos. 287 in 1993 and 911 in 1996, also signed by President Ramos, designated 5 November as a special day in Ormoc City. By 2001, Republic Act No. 9068

had declared 5 November of every year as “remembrance day in Ormoc City,” a regular working holiday. The most tangible memorial to the 1991 flood was erected at the public cemetery, with a sculpture and the following words:

In loving memory of our brothers and sisters who perished during the November 5, 1991 flashflood, whose lives had been lost by the dreadful wrath of nature, a painful event, but a crucial reminder of our obligations in the care of the environment.

*For when nature is disturbed, it strikes back in fury and spares no one* (emphasis supplied).

The process of creating social memory in disaster aftermath, when sanctioned and promoted by local and/or national authorities, is the ultimate example of how dominant history is shaped. In the case of Ormoc, the local government in 1991—led by then Ormoc mayor Victoria Locsin—supported and promoted a disaster story that placed the blame squarely on illegal logging. As logging was already a sensitive issue in a country that was only beginning to recover in the 1990s from two decades of massive government corruption under the Marcos regime, it was not difficult for Ormocanons in particular and Filipinos in general to believe this reasoning. Massive logging activities—both legal and illegal—in the decades prior to 1991 were well known in the entire archipelago, with many politicians and government officials involved either directly as loggers themselves or tagged as coddlers of illegal loggers.

But why must disasters be remembered? What do disaster narratives say about a society? Why is a well balanced disaster narrative imperative? What is the role of myths vis-à-vis factual narratives in disaster? Remembering and analyzing why something happened increases awareness and strengthens learning, which in turn improves resilience and coping mechanisms. In the case of Ormoc City, the myths that proliferated after the 1991 flood have two dimensions. First, miracle stories not only emphasize the piety of the Ormoc community. More importantly, they underscore the fatalism of a people constantly subjected to forces—both natural and man-

made—seemingly beyond ordinary human control. In a society where government is distant and generally perceived as far removed from the daily cycle of life, people have no other recourse but to depend on their own initiative and if this was not enough, to surrender to God. The fatalism inherent in the Ormoc people's psyche reflects a centuries-old conditioning of distrust and, to a large extent, disregard for government institutions that do not greatly impact on people's concerns. It also highlights the futility of directly challenging the power of nature that constantly shows the impermanence and imperfectness of infrastructure, systems, policies and laws, and as such demands that people are flexible above all. It is this fatalism that, I believe, is at the core of the Ormoc people's remarkable ability to cope under extreme and repetitive destructive natural hazards that breed disasters. The second dimension inherent in the Ormoc myth stories—particularly the popular story of the little thirsty boy who had been deprived of clean drinking water by an uncaring household—was the complicity of families and communities in bringing about the disaster, they who were economically better off. At the core of these stories is the moral lesson that selfishness, disregard, greed and unconcern for others especially of the more vulnerable do affect and, indeed, destroy an entire society. It is notable that though there were a few clubs and bars that catered to the sex industry in 1991, there were no myth stories surrounding sexual morality. In Ormoc in 1991, therefore, greed and selfishness were worse sins than sexual promiscuity. Yet these tropes were not fully allowed to surface as a collective project of social unity, and as such could only be expressed as personal stories of despair.

The role of government in the creation of an 'official' narrative of disaster is enormous, as it had in its disposal the political clout and financial wherewithal to support the activities required to engender the collective interest in keeping disaster memories alive. Yet, it is also possible that the government is not keen to support the creation of a social memory of disaster. It is notable, for example, that there was no common knowledge about the 1953 North Sea flood (*watersnoodramp* or flood disaster) in the Netherlands, even though it was considered one of the worst and most

traumatizing events in that country, resulting in the death of 1836 people, 72,000 lost homes and flooding to an area measuring almost 500,000 acres.<sup>1006</sup> In a post-World War II Europe trying to rise from the horrors of war, the Dutch media focused on the idealistic image of unity, heroism and determination, rather than the realities of trauma, sorrow, death and loss. Of course the Dutch people and government later successfully mitigated future similar disasters through the ambitious “Deltaplan” and the extensive technological marvel called Delta Works. But it was only forty years after the North Sea Flood when the watersnoodramp’s narrative, which till then had been predominantly a story of fraternity and cohesion, was allowed to reflect survivors’ accounts, documented for the first time.<sup>1007</sup> The inclusion of survivors’ ethnographies enriched the narrative of the 1953 North Sea Flood by surfacing new cultural themes such as regret, guilt, and despair.

At the city level, collective commemoration primarily highlighted change and growth of Ormoc, rather than the individual chaos experienced by the survivors, or even the root causes of the disaster. The news reports that also proliferated at the time, particularly from national news outfits, focused on investigating illegal disaster, but failed to include in any meaningful way the culpability of elite families. A groundbreaking investigative book was published two years after the Ormoc tragedy that would uncover the intricate links between politics and the environment, and would become the first book to delve into the murky world of logging in the Philippines before, during and immediately after the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos. *Power from the Forest* by Marites Vitug was also the first time to put the blame squarely on deforestation, not illegal logging, as the primary cause of the devastation in the wake of the Ormoc floods.<sup>1008</sup> As such, the culpability of government agencies—and politicians, especially those that came from elite bloodlines—through the implementation of land use policies and the massive conversion of forestlands into agricultural and

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<sup>1006</sup> I. Duine (September 2015), “From silence to recognition, The Changing narrative of the 1953 North Sea Flood in the Netherlands,” in *Natural Hazards Observer*, Vol. 40 No. 1, trans. and adapted by E. Weesjes (Natural Hazards Center, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder, September 2015), 4-9.

<sup>1007</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>1008</sup> M. Vitug (1993), *The Politics of Logging, Power from the Forest*.

commercial logging areas was highlighted for the first time in Philippine history. Yet while the book paved the way for increased awareness of the devastating impact of deforestation in the country, no one among those who had been identified was ever charged until today. More disturbingly, the 1991 Ormoc flood presaged a series of massive disasters that rivaled it in the number of deaths and properties destroyed. The Ormoc tragedy became only one among many disasters, and the powerful message of *Power from the Forest* was eventually superseded by more urgent concerns of relief and rehabilitation from subsequent disasters. In the face of these realities, however, ordinary Filipinos—including those who were the most vulnerable in every community that experienced the devastation of recent volcanic eruptions, flooding and earthquakes—were able to cope again and again, even without corresponding changes in laws that are direct consequences of these disasters. So long as elite families are allowed to insulate themselves from public discourse in disaster aftermath, there can be no lasting learning from catastrophes. As such, Philippine society is bound to repeat the same cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

In the case of the 1991 Ormoc flood, the local government was instrumental in initiating commemoration activities apart from declaring 5 November as a day of mourning, such as the celebration of Holy Mass and candle-lighting activities along Ormoc Bay. If in the early years after 1991 more people participated in these activities, attendance subsequently dwindled until only the occasional Eucharistic masses and the ubiquitous tarpaulin survived, the latter of which was erected prominently in the city square with photos of the flood effects and the reconstruction period. Aside from the sculpture in the Ormoc City Public Cemetery, another infrastructural monument to the 1991 flood is the Japanese-designed, -built and -funded slit dams and dikes. However, the low interest among Ormoc residents in the social memory of the 1991 flood reflected in the current scarcity in cultural and literary work such as plays, poems, essays, etc. In fact, this ethnographic study is the first known collection of personal narratives of that disaster.

The ethnographic process, which entailed hours of open interviews using a set of questions to provide general framework, allowed flood survivors to explore feelings that had not ever been discussed outside the confines of the family and surprisingly did not wane after twenty or so years. These emotions—guilt for being alive while loved ones had died, despair, meaninglessness, regret, anger at God—remained strong in personal psyches so that when asked to relive the events of 5 November 1991, many of the respondents still cried. What was notable was that most of them had not had any trauma counseling after the 1991 disaster. In a survey conducted three years and five months after November 1991, survivor respondents were found to exhibit either of two sub-categories of emotion-focused coping: escapism (e.g., *I tried not to think about it. I distract myself so that I won't remember*) and seeking meaning (e.g., *I tried to see it as the will of God and accept it as such*). In 2013 during the ethnographic research among Ormoc survivors, these two coping strategies were very much evident. Escapism was a default mechanism for many families who had been affected by the death and destruction of the 1991 flood, preferring instead to act on the daily demands of life rather than processing the emotional and psychological effects of a horrific life event. The second strategy—seeking meaning—resulted in heightened expressions of religiosity immediately after the flood, but did not necessarily translate to sustained religiosity over the years. Nonetheless, among Ormocanons themselves there was no sense of outrage over the historical processes that had created the poverty and vulnerability that afflicted the majority of Ormoc society and that led to the massive deaths and destruction in 1991. For many, that disaster was an act of God.

At the very start of this research, I argued that the 1991 Ormoc disaster cannot be natural. Historical precedents had predisposed Ormoc City to a massive flood that rendered the most vulnerable and poorest families and communities ever vulnerable to succeeding economic and physical disruptions brought about by natural hazards. However, while history forms the basis for disaster, how it is remembered reflects the relationships that characterize society with the various groups within it and



with the built and natural environment that surrounds it. It is notable that based on how the 1991 flood is remembered, Ormoc society in general do not perceive the causal links between the effects of that disaster especially among the poorest and most vulnerable communities and the economic activities of its wealthiest families. While this is not unique to Ormoc, and in fact is a common weakness in the rest of the country, social responsibility is predictably low among the wealthy families whose fortunes had been built on the maximization and utilization of the vast human and environmental resources that characterize the Philippines. The government (both at the national and local levels), the Catholic Church, the NGOs and media have not systematically demanded a sustained accounting of the elite families' roles and responsibilities in the larger society of which they are part, especially in the face of threats to its existence, such as a massive disaster. Further, the most vulnerable and poorest communities and families are not considered—and in fact do not consider themselves—as full members of society, with the capacity to contribute to the long term growth and development of Ormoc. It is not surprising, therefore, that disasters do not result in social transformation, but merely revert back to business as usual before another disaster comes to again threaten the status quo. The continued inability to promote a collective memory of the 1991 Ormoc flood—one that reflects as wide a perspective as possible from all sectors of society—condemns Ormoc City to repeat the same mistakes of its past.

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Photo of women doing their laundry in the Anilao River a day after 5 November 1991  
(Copyright: Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ormoc City)



View of the bridge cut in half along the Anilao River after the flash floods of 5 November 1991  
(Copyright: Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ormoc City)



Monsignor Villanueva saying mass at Barangay Nalunopan (pseudonym) among the sugarcane laborers, where several families had been killed during the flash floods that swept down the Malinawon creek (pseudonym), a tributary of the Anilao River on 5 November 1991  
(Copyright: Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ormoc City)





Sr. Iraida Sua-an, RSCJ with a colleague looking out to the damages along the Anilao River a few days after 5 November 1991  
(Copyright: Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ormoc City)



Trees felled by the strong flash floods from the Malinawon creek (pseudonym), a tributary of the Anilao River in Barangay Nalunopan (pseudonym)  
(Copyright: Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ormoc City)



Mud left behind by the flash floods of 5 November 1991 in downtown Ormoc City  
(Copyright: Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Ormoc City)





Public hearing conducted in Ormoc City on the assessment of Typhoon Uring's damage in the city. In the foreground with the microphone is Rosalio Goze, former Regional Executive Director of DENR  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)



Aerial view of the landslides in one of the head waters of a tributary creek to the Anilao River  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)

- Landslides in one of the head water of a tributary creek to Anilao river.



Malinawon creek (pseudonym), a tributary to the Anilao River in Barangay Nalunopan (pseudonym), which overflowed and killed several families in this sugarcane plantation  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)





The flash flood wreaked houses and infrastructure, especially those made from light materials, as shown in this photo  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)



The extensive damages wrought by Typhoon Uring and the resulting flash floods  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)



Downtown Ormoc City after 5 November 1991. Some parts of the city were not flooded. Only 40% of Ormoc had been adversely affected that day  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)





Soil creeps and mini landslides in the elevations of Ormoc City prior to the flash flood of 5 November 1991  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)



Aerial view of the damages to property wrought by Typhoon Uring on 5 November 1991  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)



Distribution of relief goods  
(Copyright: DENR Region-VIII)





Santo Niños found by one family from the mud of the 1991 flash floods and kept as a powerful memento in Barangay Tambulilid  
(Copyright: Author)



Memorial sculpture entitled "Gift of Life" by Francis Cinco in memory of those who perished in the 1991 floods  
(Copyright: Author)



Part of the JICA flood control project along the Anilao River  
(Copyright: Author)





Children playing  
in an urban poor  
community in  
Ormoc City  
(Copyright:  
Author)



A young girl  
waiting for rice to  
cook in Sudlun,  
an urban poor  
community in  
Ormoc City

(Copyright:  
Author)



Rubble that remained of  
Tasing's house after  
being bulldozed under  
orders of the *agonal*  
because no one in her  
family worked on the  
sugarcane plantation  
anymore

(Copyright: Author)





Big sister takes  
little sister for a  
bath in the  
sugarcane  
plantation  
barangay of  
Nalunopan  
(pseudonym)  
(*Copyright: Author*)



Barracks for  
sugarcane  
laborers in the  
Ondo Codilla  
sugarcane  
plantation,  
Simangan,  
Ormoc City  
(*Copyright:  
Author*)



Rugged road of  
Saint Philippine  
Duchesne  
Ormoc Workers  
Foundation, Inc.  
(SPDOWFI) of  
the Religious of  
the Sacred Heart  
of Jesus (RSCJ)  
congregation for  
sugarcane  
laborer survivors  
of the 1991 flood  
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## **Interviews<sup>3</sup>**

### **Barangay Tambulilid**

Amadeo, interview with author, 6 April 2013, in his own home, GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Amparo, interview with author, 26 April 2013, at her own home, Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Apining, interview with author, 6 April 2013, at her own home, GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, with Victor Arcuiño as interpreter, transcribed and translated by author.

Buboy, interview with author, 4 April 2013, in the GK Rotary provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author. Subsequent interviews and conversations followed.

Ciceron and Camila (husband and wife), simultaneous interviews with author, 26 April 2013, in their own home, Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Divina (original resident of Barangay Tambulilid in 1991), interview with author, 5 April 2013, in the GK Rotary provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Interview facilitated by GK Ormoc staff, in particular Buboy Igot and Kevin Caballero. Assisted by Victor Arcuiño as interpreter.

Elizabeth, interview with author, 6 April 2013, at her own home, GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, with Victor Arcuiño as interpreter, transcribed and translated by author.

Esterlita (former resident of badly hit barangay Don Felipe), interview with author, 16 April 2013, in her own house with a *sari-sari* store, Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, accompanied by Victor Arcuiño as interpreter, transcribed and translated by author. When the interview was being undertaken, a group of women neighbors were also around, listening into the interview and interjecting freely.

Eunila and Nezeli (neighbors), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 April 2013, in Eunila's own home, GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

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<sup>3</sup> Classified and listed according to place of interview.

Felicidad and Salustiana (daughter and mother), interview with author, 19 April 2013, in the community center/basketball court, Block 7, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Igot, Roberto 'Buboy' and Caballero, Kevin. Simultaneous interviews with author, 11 March 2013, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author. First interview occurred in Barangay Luna II-B at the RSCJ House, with Sister Sua-an's approval. Subsequent informal conversations and interviews occurred at GK Rotary provincial office, downtown Ormoc and general Barangay Tambulilid area.

Joan, interview with author, 24 April 2013, in her own home with *sari-sari* store, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, with Victor Arcuino as interpreter, transcribed and translated by author.

Marife (original resident of Barangay Tambulilid in 1991), interview with author, 5 April 2013, in GK Rotary provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Interview facilitated by GK Ormoc staff, in particular Buboy Igot. Assisted by Victor Arcuiño as interpreter.

Merlita, interview with author, 5 April 2013, at the GK Rotary provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, with Victor Arcuiño as interpreter, translated by author. Original interview facilitated by GK Ormoc staff, in particular Buboy Igot and Kevin Caballero. Subsequent informal interviews undertaken in her own home.

Nenita, interview with author, 19 April 2013, in her own home, GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Papenuncia (widow), interview with author, 16 April 2013, in her own home where she lived alone and tended a small *sari-sari* store, GK Rotary, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Pundato, Salem (barangay *kagawad* (councillor)), interview with author, 5 June 2013, in Barangay Tambulilid Hall, Ormoc City, original in Filipino.

Rebecca, interview with author, 24 April 2013, in her own home, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Resbeta, interview with author, 24 April 2013, in her own home with a small *sari-sari* store, in Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Roca, Ronaldo (Barangay Captain), interview with the author, 28 May 2013 in the Barangay Tambulilid Hall, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Shirley, informal interview with author, 16 April 2013, in Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City.

Solemnisa, interview with author, 5 April 2013, at GK Rotary provincial office, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, with Victor Arcuiño as interpreter, transcribed and translated by author. Interview facilitated by GK Ormoc staff, in particular Buboy Igot and Kevin Caballero. Subsequent informal interviews undertaken in her own home.

Ursula and Marilyn (mother and daughter), simultaneous interview with author, 30 May 2013, in their home, Barangay Tambulilid, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

*Purok Uno, Barangay Nalunopan (pseudonym)*

Berto and Delia (pseudonyms, husband and wife), interview with author, 14 April 2013, in their own home, Purok Uno, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Crispin (pseudonym), interview with author, 21 April 2013, in his own home, Purok Uno, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Lorna and Myrna (mother and daughter, pseudonyms), simultaneous interviews with the author, 19 May 2013, in Lorna's own home, Purok Uno, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Myrna was visiting her mother, with a young daughter. She had moved to Manila to work. During this interview, there was a female neighbor who also interjected freely in the discussion.

Nita (former resident of Barangay Nalunopan who transferred to Barangay Luna II-B), informal conversation with author, 19 May 2013, in Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, during the interview with Lorna and Myrna.

Rico, interview with the author, 21 April 2013, in the *payag* outside the house of Ronald Boy and Baby, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author

Rolando (pseudonym), interview with author, 22 April 2013, Purok Uno, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Roman, Bebung and Tenang (pseudonyms, *hornals*), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 May 2013, in front of a *sari-sari* store in Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, Author was accompanied by Ate Nita and Nang Perlita, former Barangay Nalunopan residents who had transferred to Barangay Luna II-B.

Ronald Boy and Baby (pseudonyms), simultaneous interviews with author, 21 April 2013, in their own home, Purok Uno, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Subsequent interviews and conversations separately, especially with Ronald Boy.

Roy (pseudonym), interview with author, 21 April 2014, in his own home, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and Bisaya,

Sister Iraida Sua-an, RSCJ, interview with author, 21 April 2013, in Barangay Nalunopan, original in English.

Tasing (pseudonym), interview with author, 21 April 2013, in her father Crispin's house, Purok Uno, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Tasing's house was bulldozed on orders by the *agalon*.

Velardo, Fruto (pseudonym, Barangay captain), pseudonym, interview with author, 28 May 2013, in his own home in the *barrio*, Barangay Nalunopan, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

### Downtown Ormoc City

Alfaro, Jose (Councillor), interview with the author, 19 March 2013, at the Ormoc City Hall, Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author.

Anonymous interview with a former City Administrator by the author, 7 October 2013, in Ormoc City Hall.

Ariel, interview with author, 6 July 2013, in his own home, Ormoc City, original in English, transcribed by author.

Dindin (daughter of the owners and operators of the Golden Superclub), interview with author, 7 October 2013, in Bat1, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya.

Dodong (former Catholic youth leader of EASAM, later renamed Isla Verde), interview with author, 2 June 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Estevez, Nita (pseudonym, resident at St. Benedictine Village in Barangay Ipil), interview with author, 3 September 2013, at Saint Peter's College, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Genobiagon, Arnel (former seminarian at the Saints Peter and Paul Parish Church in 1991), interview with author, 7 September 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in Filipino.

Jimenea, L. (journalist), interview with author, 12 March 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English, transcribed by author.

Laura (former Isla Verde resident), interview with author, 7 June 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in mixed English and Filipino. Interview occurred in the funeral building that her family owned.

Local journalist (anonymous), interview with author, 12 March 2013, in Ormoc City, original in mixed Filipino and English.

Loperando, Olalio (Reverend Father), interview with author, 30 August 2013, in Tacloban City, original in English.

Macatunding, Imam Mackay, interview with author, 28 May 2013, in Ormoc City, in Filipino.

Municipal Agrarian Reform officers (MARO), anonymous interview with author, 9 October 2013, at the Department of Agrarian Reform Office Region VIII, Ormoc City.

Pocson (Police Officer (Ret)), interview with author, 10 October 2013, in Ormoc City.

Santiago, Armina (pseudonym), interview with author, 4 October 2013, in downtown Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Sescon, interview with author, 4 October 2013, at Saint Peter's College, Ormoc City.

Tolibao, Coloy and Alfaro, Jose (latter a Councilor), simultaneous interviews with author, 19 March 2013, at the Ormoc City Hall, Ormoc City, original in mixed English and Filipino, transcribed and translated by the author.

Tolibao, Coloy (government personnel), interview with author, 19 March 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Filipino and English, transcribed and translated by author.

Udtohan, Bienvenido (Police Constabulary (Retired)), interview with author, 8 October 2013 in his own home, Barangay San Lorenzo, Ormoc City in Filipino.

*Purok II-B, Barangay Luna (Saint Philippine Duchesne Ormoc Workers' Foundation, Inc.)*

Daning (pseudonym, former resident at Barangay Don Felipe in 1991), interview with author, 29 May 2013, in her own home, Purok II-B, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Former barangay captain of Barangay Luna, interview of author, 15 May 2013, in his own home, Barangay Luna, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya,

Inday and Tonyang (pseudonyms, husband and wife, former residents and sugarcane workers in Barangay Nalunopan), simultaneous interviews with author, in their own home, Barangay Luna II-B, 8 March 2013, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Informal conversations with SPDOWFI residents, in February to October 2013, in Barangay Luna II-B, Ormoc City.

Perlita (former Barangay Nalunopan resident and sugarcane worker), interview with author, 2 April 2013, in the garden that she tended for Sister Iraida Sua-an, RSCJ, who employed her as all-around gardener, in Barangay Luna II-B, Ormoc City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author. Subsequent informal interviews and conversations afterwards.

Primitiva and Nita (mother and daughter, former Barangay Nalunopan residents), simultaneous interview with author, 18 March 2013, in their own home, Barangay Luna II-B, Ormoc City. Subsequent informal interviews and conversations afterwards.

Soling (former resident and sugarcane worker in Barangay Nalunopan), interview with author, 30 May 2013, in her own house in Barangay Luna II-B, original in Bisaya and Filipino,

Sua-an, Sister Iraida, RSCJ, informal conversations with author, February to October 2013, in Ormoc City.

Tamayo, Edna (pseudonym, former resident of Barangay Nalunopan), interview with author, 28 April 2013, in Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Subsequent informal conversations followed afterwards.

Teresita (pseudonym), interview with author, in her own home, Barangay Luna II-B, Ormoc City, 29 May 2013, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author.

Teresita, Roland and Angie (pseudonyms, mother, son and daughter), simultaneous interviews with author, May 29, 2013, in Barangay Luna II-B, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya and Filipino, when asked how many lived in the house, transcribed and translated by author.

### Other areas

Cañete (SPO (Ret) 4), interview with author, 7 October 2013, in PNP Retirees Area, Barangay San Roque, Ormoc City.

Chua, Dominica, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. (RAFI), interview with the author, 29 July 2013, at RAFI Building, Cebu City, original in English, transcribed by author.

Betuin, Eduardo (Senior Police Officer (SPO) 2), interview with author, 15 July 2013, in Camp Downes, Ormoc City.

Delgado, Conrado (Barangay Captain), interview with author, 10 June 2013, at Barangay Ipil City Hall, Ormoc City.

Goze, Rosalio (former Regional Executive Director, DENR-Region 8), interview with author, 1 December 2012, in Baguio City, original in Filipino, transcribed and translated by author.

Loperando, Olalio (Reverend Father) (pseudonym), interview with author, 30 August 2013, in Santo Niño Church, Tacloban City, original in English.

Mila, interview with author, 23 June 2013, in World Vision Village in Barangay Ipil, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya, transcribed and translated by author. Interview facilitated by World Vision Ormoc.

NGO worker, name withheld upon request, interview with author, 29 July 2013, in Cebu City, original in English.

Pepito, Catalino (head of millenarian group *Pilipinas Watawat ng Lahi* (Philippines, Flag of Race) or *Diyos ng Pilipinas* (God of the Philippines), informal interview with author, 4 October 2013, in his own home in a plot of land owned by the group, Barangay Domonar Puting Bato, Ormoc City, original in Bisaya. No audio-recording allowed; no photographs allowed. Author was accompanied by Perlita, a resident of Barangay Luna II-B, who was visiting her daughter and grandchildren, where we stayed for the night.

Villanueva, Jaime (Monsignor), in an interview with the author, 30 August 2013, at Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, Municipality of Burauen, Leyte province, original in English, transcribed by author.

## **DVD**

Untitled home videos. (Ormoc City, JL Photorama, 5-9 November 1991), DVD, accessed at the audio-visual room, Saint Peter's College, Ormoc City, on 17 June 2013.

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